Interview with Serban Vallimarescu

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SERBAN VALLIMARESCU

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Q: What were the circumstances, Val, of your joining the international information program?

Vallimarescu's Forced Departure From Tripartite Allied Control Commission In Romania And Entrance Into State Department

VALLIMARESCU: When I was discharged from the army in 1945, I had come back from Romania where I had been a U.S. officer as part of the Tripartite Allied Control Commission, and I had gotten married to a Romanian childhood friend, Alice. The Russians PNGed me because I spoke Romanian and I knew too many people in Bucharest. I knew what they were up to; I knew everybody from the king on down. So they said I was spying and they PNGed me, and I had to leave within a week. But I had to leave my wife behind, because the Russians wouldn't give her an exit visa. I arrived in Washington and was discharged at Camp Lee, Virginia, and then got a job with the State Department in the Office of Research and Intelligence. In the meantime, I was pulling all the strings I could to try to get Alice out of Romania. It too about six months.

Although how she got out may not be pertinent to this, it may be amusing as an indication of how one can deal successfully with the Russians. One day the executive officer of our military mission in Bucharest, a Colonel Farnsworth — God bless him; he was something of an eccentric — called into his office the Russian liaison officer we had there, Lt. Mariev. By the way, I was delighted to hear later that he defected a few months after that. Anyway, he called him in and said, “Now look Lieutenant, if your people don't give Mrs. Vallimarescu an exit visa within a week, we are going to hold as hostages in Washington the wives of two members of your military mission.” He had no authorization to do anything like this. But within 48 hours Alice got her permit to leave. So that's an indication of how effectively this kind of tactic works.

Family Illness Disrupts Department of State Service, But Eventually Vallimarescu Joins VOA In New York

So Alice did arrive in Washington. I was working for the Office of Research and Intelligence. And then Alice got sick — tuberculosis — and I think I was had then, because I found a doctor who said that surgery was necessary, major surgery. And they took two ribs out of her. She was in the hospital for something like three months. And we found out later that it was really not necessary. That set me back considerably financially. But I was lucky enough that my father had been sent to Norway by King Michael as Romanian Minister, chief of mission. He offered to pay for our transportation so we could stay in Oslo for as long as necessary, until Alice recuperated. She had to be taken on board the ship on a stretcher, and she had to lie down all the time across the ocean.

Q: Did you take leave from the State Department?

VALLIMARESCU: No, I resigned. I just left the State Department because I didn't know how long it was going to take. We spent almost a year in Norway. And then father, being a man of conviction, resigned — as he had during the Nazi period — as Ambassador to Norway when Ana Pauker came in as foreign minister and Vyshinsky imposed a

pro-Communist, pro-Soviet government. He was obviously going to have to go back somewhere, to Argentina, and we had to go back to the States. We came back to the States — no job — and we stayed with some very good friends of ours. He was a student at Princeton, and they were living in sort of a barracks type of thing, or Quonset hut. We stayed with them for about three months, and I was drawing unemployment compensation. Then we moved to New York, to a cold water flat, fourth floor, a rather rundown building, and all we had was a hot plate.

I was given a job of translation by “Wild Bill” Donovan, who had been my overall boss during the war when I was with the OSS. He had a law firm, and I was given the job of translating from Romanian into English a whole bunch of legal documents involving the Standard Oil of New Jersey claim against the Romanian government for taking over their installations. I think the General did that just out of, I don't know, consideration for an ex-colleague. In the meantime I heard that there was such a thing as the Voice of America, and I figured that I would apply. I did apply, but I didn't hear a thing, not a word, for almost a year. In the meantime I had opened up my own little translation office. I had on contract a bunch of students from Columbia who could do anything from Hindi to Guarani — but I never had a Guarani translation. But that didn't do too well. I was sharing an office with an old Army buddy of mine who was in the import-export business.

Then one day I was walking down West 57th Street and ran into an old friend who was a Time correspondent — his name was Shea — and he says, “Val, what are you doing?” I said, “Well, I'm trying to get a job with the Voice of America, but I haven't heard from them.” He said, “The Voice of America? I know the director very well. I'll talk to Foy Kohler. Give me your address, your phone number.” By then we had moved out of the cold water flat and into a warm water flat, with an elevator. So, lo and behold — it proves that this works here, too, and not just in Latin America: if you know the right people you get the job — within a week I get a call from the personnel office at the Voice of America, saying,

“Would you like to come in? We have a job for you in the Romanian Service as translator-announcer.” And I said, “Would I like to come in!” So that's how I started.

About four months later I got a letter in the mail from VOA Personnel, saying, “Your application has been received. Unfortunately, there are no vacancies, but we have put it on file and as soon as there is an opening we will let you know.”

Q: I had exactly the same experience. (Laughter)

VALLIMARESCU: Well, anyway, that's how it all started. I was a translator-announcer, GS-7, in 1949. I had some interesting experiences during those days.

Q: What was life like in a relatively small Service — a specialized Service at that?

VALLIMARESCU: It was a small Service. I think there were about — the two Zeider girls, Munteano, myself, the chief, who was Cehan...

Enter One, Paul Deac, The Formation Within VOA Of “The Loyal American Underground.” Troubles With House Committee On Un-American Activities, And Ultimately, The McCarthy Upheavals.

Q: Was Paul Deac there?

VALLIMARESCU: Paul Deac was the producer, but he was involved in many other things, mostly with Cohn and Schine. We're talking about 1950, right? When was the Cohn and Schine Thing?

Q: Cohn and Schine came about '52, '53, as I recall.

VALLIMARESCU: All right. But Paul was already on board. He was a lousy producer, by the way. Life in the Service was very pleasant, because there were these two sisters. I mention them because they played a part in my little encounter with Paul Deac: the Zeider

girls. George Munteano was a refugee, as it were; he didn't yet have his green card. It was a very, very congenial, pleasant atmosphere.

There's one story that tells you a lot about the United States of America. It's about a friend of mine whom I hired, and who passed away just about two weeks ago — Razi, Mike Razi.

Q: He did pass away? I hadn't heard that. I'm so sorry.

VALLIMARESCU: Heart attack. Two weeks ago.

Q: I was out of the city on vacation.

VALLIMARESCU: I hired him. Well, I recommended him to the chief of the Service. And so Mike was on board. He had given me as a reference for clearance. One day I was at my desk, typing away, when two very serious looking gentlemen came up and said, “Are you Mr. Vallimarescu?” I said, “Yes.” “Well, we have something serious to discuss with you about a certain Mr. Gerasimo Razi.” I said, “Well, please sit down. What seems to be the problem?” “Well, you see, we are private investigators, and Mr. Razi has made an application for a loan to buy a car. The problem with him is that he has no credit; he does not owe anything to anybody.” Now Mike Razi, like any good European, was very proud of the fact that he didn't owe. He paid; he never took anything on credit. He was brand new in the United States. I laughed and said, “Let me explain about Mr. Razi. He is a man of the greatest integrity, and in Europe in the old days — and he is one of the older generation — to have debts was very bad. I can assure you that you can give him a loan and he will pay you.” Then I explained to Mike, “From now on you will start borrowing, and don't pay everything off right away.” So that's one story.

I think we can get to my problems with Paul Deac. From the very beginning of our association — '50-'51 — I could see that Paul was involved in checking on people's movements, asking a lot of questions about people's backgrounds, and when the whole Cohn and Schine, McCarthy investigation of the Voice started, Paul was — well, he

described himself as the head of the Loyal American Underground. He used to leave on the desk paper with the House Un-American Activities Committee letterhead, so as to make sure that we knew damn well what he was up to.

One day I remember he came to me — and by that time we had another chief, a Mr. Cokutz. Mr. Cokutz was a Romanian-American who had been a professor somewhere in a Southern university. He had been put in — I don't remember how, but he was sort of thrust upon the voice of America. I believe it was through the influence of McCarthy, because he was a mild gentleman, somewhat of a Casper Milquetoast, but he was completely under Paul Deac's thumb. He didn't dare do anything without first checking with Paul Deac.

By that time I had been promoted to GS-9, and was deputy chief of the Service. One day Paul Deac approached George Munteano, and told George — who was known as Bill — “Bill, you know there are a number of people here who are not very patriotic Americans, and we” — he used the royal we, but by that he meant Cohn and Schine and himself — “we would very much appreciate it if you kept us informed of any subversive activities or even subversive statements made by the people here.” Bill said, “Well, I don't know. I don't think I can do that.” So Paul said, “Now look Bill, you know you're not a citizen, and if you don't cooperate, you can get thrown out of this country. Would you like to be back in Romania?” Bill was terrified, and came to see me and said, “What can I do about it?” I said, “Bill, just stall, but don't start spying. First of all, there's nothing to spy about. Everybody in this Service is a very loyal person and employee, whether they're American or not.”

Well, then Paul Deac took me out for coffee, and said, “Val, I know your background and your father's background, and I know your heart is in the right place. And you know, Val, there are some disloyal people in this Service. The two I'm most concerned about are the Zeider sisters.” The Zeider sisters must have been in their forties or early fifties, and they were sweet little ladies and very good employees. He said, “You know, they're really not very loyal to us, and you know of course that they're Jewish.” I said, “So, what does that

mean?" "Well, you know, most Jews in this country are leftists" — and mind you, Cohn and Schine were Jewish too! But he was using that because he knew that there was a lot of anti-Semitism in Romania, so he figured that that particular approach would work. That shows you how little he knew me. He said, "So I think I'm going to recommend that they be dismissed, and I would like your cooperation. If you can just write a statement to the effect that these ladies are not very loyal, and that it is reflected in their work."

I said, "Paul, you must be out of your raving mind. They are very loyal, they've very good employees and I'll be damned if I'm going to do this." He said, "Val, you are a naturalized citizen, and you know that Sen. McCarthy has a lot of influence, and you could get into serious trouble." And Cliff, I did something that I had never done before and I have never done again. We were in the Voice building, having a cup of coffee upstairs in an office that he had found. I said, "All right, Paul, you come right down on West 57th Street and I'm going to beat the shit out of you." I said, "Where were you during the war, when I was a paratrooper and I was fighting for my country?" Because he had not served in the army. He had had some sort of medical dispensation. I said, "We can go right down and I'm going to beat the shit out of you. I'm not going to cooperate and I'm going to report you to the VOA bosses." "Well, we'll see about that," he said, but he shook. He shook. And I never had any more trouble with him. And I did report this to Al Puhan, the VOA program manager.

The Zeider girls were not dismissed. But the atmosphere was absolute hell, Cliff; it was terrible in those days. Munteano and the Zeider girls were terrified, and finally I went to Cokutz and he did nothing. He was a Casper Milquetoast, as I said, and he did nothing. Eventually this quieted down, and I became chief of the Romanian Service, before we moved to Washington.

I just remembered another incident which I think can be attributed to Paul Deac, who by that time had a little office in his home where he was publishing a newsletter which was, again, trying to point to so-called un-American, subversive types in the Voice of America

and the U.S. Information Agency. He was operating out of his cellar, I think. He had a lot of connections with ethnic groups — Polish-Americans, Romanian-Americans, Hungarian-Americans — but thank God, he never amounted to anything.

One day I was called by the Office of Security, and was told that there was someone coming to see me, someone from the FBI, about a rather important and urgent matter. I said, “Fine.” The gentleman does show up, shows me his credentials, and we go into a private office. He says, “Mr. Vallimarescu, I'm sorry, but we have to look into some charges that have been made against you.” “Oh? And what are these charges?” “Well, it seems that when you were at Harvard, from '40 to '43, you belonged to an organization” — and I don't remember now what the organization's name was — “and you contributed to an organization that harbored many pro-communists or communist sympathizers or Soviet sympathizers.” To make a long story short, at first I couldn't remember a damn thing about it. But then I said, “Yes, I remember now. It was headed by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the President of the United States. It was an outfit collecting funds to support the Allies, including the Soviet Union. It had very distinguished people; Wendell Willkie was on the board.” And as God is my witness, that's the outfit that someone denounced me for having belonged to.

I always suspected Paul Deac, because he was a natural guy to have written an anonymous letter. But how did he know I had belonged to that outfit? I don't know. Anyway, the fact of the matter is I had contributed funds, and it was a very respectable organization. But nothing came of it, because we had a chief of security in USIA then, his name was Joseph C. Walsh — he ended up being on my staff in Mexico City later on — but he was a very reasonable man. He looked at the file, they all looked at the file, and I think there is probably now in my file something clearing me completely.

Korea: Vallimarescu Recalled To Military Duty—And The Comedy Of Errors In Army Service That Was A Mistake In First Place

My VOA career in New York was interrupted. I was a reserve officer, and shortly after the Korean War started, about six months after, the Voice wanted to start Romanian transmissions from Munich, and they wanted to set up a Romanian Service; they had me in mind to go there and start it. This was moving along, when I happened to get a letter, sort of a “Greetings” letter: You are hereby recalled to active duty. Please report to Fort Rile, Kansas, on such and such a date. So I go to the VOA personnel office and say, “What do I do about this?” “Oh, no, we can't let you go!” So the Voice tried to get the order canceled. Well, it looked as if they hadn't succeeded, because the orders were confirmed.

So we said goodbye to the people at the Voice, and Alice and I drove out to Fort Riley, Kansas, where I reported to the 301st Radio Broadcasting and Leaflet Group, which was a reserve outfit headed by a Colonel Gruber, who in civilian life was in charge of the printing presses of the New York Daily News. We spent about four months in Fort Riley, Kansas, and then I'm shipped to Germany, not to Korea. Alice joined me later, so this cost the taxpayer quite a lot of money. I was terribly frustrated, because had they sent me to Korea I would have understood, but to be sent to Germany where all we did was print leaflets simulating a war situation, addressing Russians, making tapes for Russian soldiers, asking them to surrender — absolutely ridiculous. I was very frustrated.

We had in my company a corporal called Gates Davison, who happened to be the nephew of John J. McCloy, who was the U.S. High Commissioner in Bonn. He managed a deal whereby he and I, in civilian clothes, were assigned to the High Commission — to Mickey Boerner, who was in charge of the public affairs section of the High Commission. So we moved to Bonn from Heidelberg. That was fun, because the Davison lived in the High Commission residence with his uncle, and we had dinners and luncheons with Dean Acheson and other such important visitors. So we had fun.

But one day comes a query from the Pentagon, asking what Lt. Vallimarescu is doing in the army, because the order calling him back to active duty had been canceled. It turns out — this was a civilian outfit — the adjutant, a Capt. Jabbour, I still remember, had

received one of these circular orders full of abbreviations and numbers, and one had Lt. Vallimarescu, serial number so and so, CWT and about a paragraph of abbreviations. He figured this probably confirmed that he's in our outfit. Well, what that order actually said — had he not been a civilian reserve officer who couldn't read army jargon, he would have known that it canceled the orders which had called me back to active duty. So I wasn't supposed to be there!

Well, a friend of mine, a colleague, a young Lt. Raab, was a good friend of Art Buchwald, and he was going to Paris quite often. He had lunch with Art Buchwald, who thought this was hilarious. So Buchwald, in one of his columns, had a couple of paragraphs about this poor Lt. Vallimarescu, who is in the army, has been in the army almost a year, but shouldn't have been. So Vallimarescu wants to know: Can he sue the government, or can the government sue him for all the pay that he's been receiving? The general who was in charge of our forces in Paris — I don't remember who he was then — read it in the International Herald Tribune, and he hit the ceiling. He ordered an investigation, and a serious reprimand for Colonel Gruber, and within three months we were back in the United States, discharged. I remember I even got a bonus, to sort of make up for the aggravation that this had caused. And it had cost me a job as chief of the Romanian Service in Munich, because when it was set up I wasn't there.

I still have that Art Buchwald column. When I finally met him, when I was assigned in Paris years later, Art Buchwald remembered the story. He thought it was hilarious.

Back to VOA. 1954: VOA Move From New York To Washington And 1955: Head Of VOA Romanian Language Service

That brings me to another story. I remember I was brought the plans for our Romanian Service in the new building, the HEW building in Washington. We were in New York, but you know, they wanted my approval for the office plans. I made some minor changes. And lo and behold, we arrived in Washington.

Q: Deac did not come to Washington, did he?

VALLIMARESCU: No, he did not come. I think he was no longer with the Voice of America when we moved to Washington — as far as I remember. Anyway, we moved to Washington, and George (Bill) Munteano was my deputy then. Munteano came from Transylvania — a Romanian from Transylvania — and the Romanians from Transylvania were more Romanian than the King of Romania, more Catholic than the Pope. The day after we had set up shop in the HEW building, Bill storms into my office and says, in Romanian, “Serban, you are a traitor!” I said, “Are you under the influence of Paul Deac?” “No! You are a traitor. Do you realize that the Hungarian Service — which was next door — has several more square feet of space than we do?” I said, “But Bill, they have more employees.” “Well, that's just what I mean. The State Department, everybody's pro-Hungarian, and you, as a Romanian, have accepted and approved these plans.” I said, “Bill, I am not a Romanian. I am an American, remember? And Transylvania is of no concern to me really. We are here, Americans, having to deal with the fact that the Hungarian Service has a few more employees and therefore needs a little more space.” Well, Bill Munteano did not speak to me for three months except for strictly professional reasons. But this illustrates that it takes a while to become an American and to understand that in America we do things differently.

Q: Did he get his citizenship — despite Paul Deac?

VALLIMARESCU: He did get his citizenship. Actually, in the Romanian Service, nobody was hurt. People were scared, some people were scared, but nobody was hurt or lost a job. Others did in the Voice, however. Auberjenois, several people did. But in the Romanian Service, nobody did. I would like to think that, to some extent, I contributed to this by threatening to beat the shit out of Paul Deac.

Well, I became the chief of the Romanian Service, and our staff increased. I think we ended up having about 12 employees.

The Interlude of Mr. Poppele

There are many stories connected with the Romanian Service. We had a director called Poppele. I'm sure you remember Jack Poppele. Mr. Poppele was a businessman from...

Q: He was the chief engineer with WOR who built the transmitters on the Palisades in New Jersey, which were called Poppele's Folly because they were never used.

VALLIMARESCU: Poppele's Folly. And Mr. Poppele was a nice man, but he was something of an ignoramus. The exiled king of Romania came to visit the Voice of America. This must have been 1955. He came to the Romanian Service, and the entire staff assembled around him and we had a picture taken, which I still have and every member of the staff still has, those who are alive. Then I had to accompany His Majesty to Mr. Poppele's office for an appointment. Well, the director was late, he wasn't there, and the man who received him was Gene King, who was then program manager, and we made some small talk. Finally, Poppele walks in and with his outstretched hands, says, “Oh, so nice to meet you, Mr. King” — talking not to Gene King but to King Michael of Romania. Well, King Michael sort of smiled, and we all sat down, and Poppele asked, “Well, Mr. King — like Mr. President — I hope you listen to the Voice of America all the time back there in Romania.” Of course, the king had abdicated a year before.

Q: He was selling insurance or something in Switzerland, wasn't he?

VALLIMARESCU: That's right. So we were all a little fidgety, but King Michael had a good sense of humor, and he did say, “While I was still there, Mr. Poppele, I did listen to the Voice of America.” “Oh, you mean you're not there anymore? But you're going back, and when you go back, make sure you listen to the Voice of America. Val, be sure to give him a program schedule.” By that time, Gene King said, “Well, His Majesty is late for an appointment.” And that was the end of our meeting with Mr. Poppele. The king was very amused by it all.

Q: That's a classic Poppele story.

VALLIMARESCU: Yes, that's a classic story. Well, a few more anecdotes. One that shows how bureaucracy functions. I was absolutely indignant. I was sent to New York — well, I sent myself to New York to interview some distinguished refugees who were arriving from Romania. It was an overnight thing, so I parked my car at National Airport and picked it up the next day. When I submitted my voucher, I included 75 cents, which was then the fee for overnight parking at National Airport. Lo and behold, the voucher comes back after about a week or ten days disallowing the 75 cents and saying I was not authorized parking. Regulations prohibit it. Of course 75 cents didn't mean much to me, but I sent back a memo saying, “What should I have done?” A memo comes back saying, “Under the regulations taxis are authorized.” But a taxi was about $10 one way, so it would have cost the government $20. That's all right; that's okay, but the 75 cents is disallowed. I was so upset that I figured out that in terms of man hours and paper and all the rest it cost the government something like $250 to disallow 75 cents. I don't know if it's still that way, but it probably is.

1956: Entry Into Foreign Service. Information Officer, Mexico

Well, I was getting a little bit restless. The chief of the East Europe Branch in the European Division was one Bob Delaney, whom we all know. We used to go out to lunch and have a martini or two, and one day he said, “Val, you're getting into a rut.” I said, “What do you mean, I'm getting into a rut?” “Well, if you stay here, you're going to be for the rest of your life a Romanian radio expert. You have what it takes to join the Foreign Service. Why don't you take the exam? Why don't you join the Foreign Service?” I talked to Alice about it, but I loved the Voice of America, with all its animosities and conflicts. I always felt that that's where the action was, certainly within USIA. So it took me about a year before I decided that maybe he was right.

So I applied for the Foreign Service, and was examined by a panel of three distinguished gentlemen, headed by one Al Harkness. On the panel was Ted Tanen, who happened to be a friend of ours. He and his wife were friends of Alice's and mine. I remember at one point during the exam Al Harkness said, “Well, I see here that you claim to speak French. Ted, will you speak French to Val and check on his French?” Ted said, “I'll be damned if I do. His French is probably 5-5 and mine at best is 3-3. I will not speak French to Val; you can take my word for it, he's fluent.”

Well, I was paneled, I was accepted, and I was lucky enough as my first assignment to be sent to Mexico City as information officer.

Q: That was quite an auspicious beginning.

VALLIMARESCU: Yes, it was an auspicious beginning. I was very lucky. I had about two or three months of training and then we took off for Mexico City. We had our two children — one was born in '53 and the other in '56, so one was two and one was five. We drove to Mexico City. It was a long drive, but we finally arrived at the border. I left the kids in the car with Alice. I was very proud, because I had an American diplomatic passport, my first. And Alice and the children were on Alice's diplomatic passport. So I take the passports and go into the Mexican immigration office. They asked me to sit down and I showed them the pass- ports. An official looks at the them and sees that I was born in Bucharest and Alice was born in Bucharest, Romania. He looks very puzzled. He says to me in Spanish, “You were born in Romania?” I said, “Yes.” “Well, you were born in the American Embassy.” “No.” “Well, your father was American-born.” “No. We're both naturalized citizens.” “You're naturalized citizens? And you are a first secretary of embassy of the United States?” “Yes.” So then he says, “Pepe! Juan!” He calls three or four of his colleagues. “Come over here! Come over here! Do you see these passports? This American diplomat is going as a first secretary of embassy to Mexico, the American embassy in Mexico, and they're not born in

the United States. He's a naturalized American. Now do you want to know why I want to emigrate to the United States?!" (Laughter) I was delighted.

Extra Curricular Activities Assigned by Ambassador Hill

Anyway, we arrive in Mexico City — which was our first post and to this day, probably, I look back upon it as the most fun post, the most exciting post — maybe because it was the first one, and we were young, and Mexico City was not polluted at the time, and I had an ambassador who was Robert C. Hill, a Republican appointee, who took a liking to me. I even had to accompany him to the dentist sometimes because he felt lonely and he didn't speak Spanish. He never learned Spanish. He did me no favor, because he was not very popular with the State Department career types, and he didn't like them either; he considered them stuffed shirts.

He did something absolutely unprecedented: he appointed me protocol officer for the embassy, which traditionally is the job of someone in the political section of the embassy. The job is a pain in the derriere because it means you have to do seating plans for luncheons and dinners; you have to collect a group of minions for any big reception, you have to find vice consuls, young officers — five or six — to arrive at the embassy residence about half an hour or an hour before the party started, to make sure that everybody was being greeted, and that everybody met everybody who was important, who the guest of honor was. Then Bob Hill would give the word: Val, it's time for these damned people to leave. So then we had to go around saying goodbye to each other and to other members of the embassy, making quite a show of saying goodbye, giving the idea they should leave. Anyway it was not a very pleasant job, and it meant a lot of work that I didn't really feel was mine to do.

Q: It must have interfered with your regular work as IO.

VALLIMARESCU: It interfered a lot with my work as IO and my PAO was upset. What was amusing is that about a month after this designation, the political counselor, who was

a good friend, Ray Led, came down to my office and said, “Val, I hope you won't mind, but I'm going to go to the ambassador to lodge a formal protest against your appointment as protocol officer because this is the prerogative of the political section.” I said, “Ray, please do it. And I hope you succeed.” He was a very smart man, but not smart enough to know that that was exactly the sort of thing that Bob Hill would enjoy. He wanted the State Department people to have their noses out of joint. Ray went, lodged his complaint and the ambassador said that it was acknowledged but that Val will remain as protocol officer for as long as he was ambassador to Mexico. So I was protocol officer.

Presidential Visits And CODELs

Mexico City was, as I said, a fun place for me, for us. We were young and enjoyed the work very much, and enjoyed the people. In Mexico I was responsible for all the press operations for three presidential visits. First, Eisenhower to Acapulco — because Eisenhower's doctor wouldn't let him go to Mexico City because of the altitude. So Eisenhower came to Acapulco. That's when I first met Gen. Vernon Walters, who was not a general then, I think he was a major. He was the interpreter for the meeting between Lopez Mateos and Eisenhower. I still remember at the airport Eisenhower and Mateos on a platform and next to Eisenhower, at attention, very stiff, was Maj. Vernon Walters. Flawless Spanish. He has flawless French, he has flawless German, he has flawless Italian. And you know, Eisenhower — God rest his soul — was not a great orator. Sometimes he made grammatical errors, too. I'll never forget how impressed I was by the fact that Eisenhower would say a sentence or two and Walters would translate and the sentence or paragraph in English sounded a little awkward, but when it came out in Spanish it was beautiful language.

Of course a couple of weeks before that we had had to case the joint. I went out there with a number of people from USIS and from security, and I remember that we went to see the mayor. I was there, and the head of security for the embassy, and some of the advance party from Washington. The mayor, among other things, said very proudly that

he'd cleaned up the city; that all the houses of prostitution had been closed and all the ladies sent away. And at that point I said, “Oh, no, no, don't do that, because we're going to have about 200 American newspapermen, and one of the first things they ask is, 'Where is the action'? And by 'Where is the action,' that's what they mean.” So I convinced the mayor that he should leave at least one or two houses open. And he said, “All right, I'll leave one, but it's an elegant one. I'll take you there so you can see what it's like.”

The press attach# and I, accompanied by one of the mayor's minions, went up on a hill to a beautiful house, all pink, with a lovely terrace and swimming pool — the best house of prostitution in Acapulco. We looked around. It was in the daytime, by the way; the ladies were not around. One thing I remember that impressed me very much was that over the bar was a sign: American Express Cards Accepted. You could do your thing and pay with American Express. And lo and behold, of course, when the journalists came — a couple of them were good friends of mine — they figured that the USIS guy assigned to them should know where the action is, and we were able to tell them where it was, and many of them used their American Express cards. (Laughter)

The second presidential visit was again Eisenhower, but this time at the border, up north. It was a couple of years later. And then the big presidential visit, for which I was again fully responsible in terms of press arrangements, was the Kennedy visit. Kennedy and Jackie came to Mexico City in 1961, and that was a roaring success. It was magnificent. Her little bit of Spanish — I remember at the luncheon she spoke in Spanish, haltingly, but she wowed them. The press operation was so perfect that Pierre Salinger had almost nothing to do, really. He was gallivanting around and we were fully in charge, and USIS got kudos, and I got something that I cherish, in addition to an autographed picture of Kennedy. By that time the ambassador was Thomas Mann, who was a career diplomat.

The day the Kennedys were leaving, we were at the airport — several people from USIS, you know, all the people who were responsible for a visit like this. I was out there with my staff an hour and a half or two hours ahead of time, to make sure that the press was

going to be well taken care of. Pierre Salinger arrived about forty-five minutes or an hour before departure time, and I said, “Pierre, could you give me the text of the message that President Kennedy will be sending to President Mateos as his plane crosses over the border?” “What message?” I said, “Well, Pierre, this is traditional.” “Oh, my goodness, where's the ambassador?” Well, Mann was there, too. “Mr. Ambassador, Val is asking...” “Oh,” says Tom Mann, “This is terrible, I forgot all about it. Val, sit down here and draft something.” So I sat down on a suitcase and drafted a message which was the message that, with some minor changes, Kennedy sent to Mateos. Lo and behold, about a month and a half later, I get — framed — a photocopy of my message, in my handwriting, with President Kennedy's changes, and with an inscription saying, “Text of Message Drafted by Serban Vallimarescu, Information Officer, etc.” It's one of my most cherished memories. It was very nice of Pierre to think of doing that.

Q: It certainly was.

VALLIMARESCU: Then we had, while I was still in Mexico, a lot of CODELs — Congressional delegations — as you can imagine, one after the other. And we had Adlai Stevenson. That was shortly after I had arrived and I was pretty naive at the time. I didn't know how the Mexican press functioned. I was out at the airport to meet Ambassador Stevenson. I called him Governor. He had said that he didn't want a press conference, that he would have sort of a boiler-plate type of arrival statement. Well, of course, the place was filled with journalists. I greet the ambassador, and we go into the VIP room. I said, “There's no press conference, Mr. Ambassador, as per your request. But there are a lot of people out there so why don't you read your arrival statement,” which he did. Then we started walking out and a more aggressive journalist from Excelsior — which was the leading morning daily — grabbed him and asked him some questions. Stevenson was very gracious. He stops and takes me aside and says, “Do these people understand what 'Off the Record' means or 'On Background'?” I said, “Of course Mr. Ambassador, of course they do. This is Excelsior.” So he answered the question saying, “This is not for direct attribution. It's really off the record.” The next morning the headline said, “In an

off-the-record statement, Ambassador Stevenson said...” (Laughter) Well, I learned my lesson. Thank God, he was smarter than I was. What he had said was really innocuous, so it didn't rock any boats. But that night we had a reception, and I was there and I was very embarrassed. When he greeted me, Stevenson saw that I was embarrassed, cringing almost, and he said, “Well, I guess, Val, off the record doesn't translate into Spanish very well, does it?” Well, ever since then, when dealing with Latin American journalists there is no such thing as “Off the Record” or “On Background” unless I know them very, very well.

Issues (And Some Answers) With The Mexicans During Vallimarescu's Mexican Tour

Q: What were some of the substantive issues between the United States and Mexico that you had to deal with during that period?

VALLIMARESCU: There were quite a number of them. One of the most substantive issues that we had to deal with was Mexico's attitude toward Cuba, because Mexico, as you know, had this Estrada doctrine of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. They had good relations with Castro, and when we were trying to get Cuba expelled from the OAS, Mexico would not play ball. On the contrary, Mexico would be opposing us and lobbying against us.

And then we had the traditional issue of wetbacks, we had the issue of that little island in the Rio Grande, the Chamizal, that they claimed was theirs and that was eventually given back to them. That was a very important issue for them. It's really in the middle of the river, and it was sort of part of El Paso, Texas, and they wanted it back. They finally got it back and that will be another story.

Other issues: drugs were at that time not prominent at all. Economic assistance. Cooperation on international issues was one issue in which Mexico was always dragging their feet because they didn't want to appear to be always responsive to what we wanted. I remember one of the things I was proudest of was when we were trying to get Mexico to go along with expelling Cuba from the OAS and in denouncing Cuba for violations

of human rights. I had established very good relations with the editor-in-chief of a daily newspaper that was really the semi-official paper, and was pretty anti-American. I had become quite close to him, had luncheons with him, and had discussed this issue with him. They published an editorial very supportive of our position, almost as if I had written it myself. I was very proud of that particular operation.

And of course, during this whole Cuban thing there were a lot of anti-American demonstrations in the streets. One day I'm sitting in my office and my secretary says, “Mr. Vallimarescu there's a gentleman out there who says it's urgent for him to see you.” “Does he have an appointment?” “No.” But I have this open door policy and he comes in, closes the door, and says, “Mr. Vallimarescu many of us Mexicans are very disturbed by all these anti-American demonstrations. I think we have to do something to show that not all Mexicans are anti-American and pro-Soviet.” I said, “Well, I think that's a great idea. What are you going to do?” “Well, we could organize a different kind of demonstration, an anti-Soviet, pro-American demonstration.” “Oh? You could do that? Whom do you represent?” “Well, I, uh, I work with students and political leaders.” I could see it coming. He says, “Of course that will cost a little money.” “Oh, how much?” “Well, it all depends. For a student the fee is” — and he gave me a figure. “Now if you want a labor leader, it's a little more. If you want some university professors, they come pretty high.” I let him talk. “We could have a good mix, so it wouldn't be too expensive.” It turned out that for the sum of about five or six thousand dollars I could have a demonstration of about 100 people in front of the Soviet embassy. Well, needless to say, I threw him out. Not literally, but I said, “We don't do this sort of thing. Thank you very much for your friendship.”

Q: What about the Alliance for Progress?

VALLIMARESCU: The Alliance for Progress had an impact largely because Kennedy and Jackie had an impact in Mexico, as they did in all of Latin America and it was his plan, but they were skeptical as to how it was going to really work out. They were enthusiastic about it because it was Kennedy's plan. The reception that the Kennedys got in the streets of

Mexico City was absolutely phenomenal. Good looking, both of them; Catholic; and young. I mean, you can't go wrong. So, to answer your question: the Alliance for Progress was great because it was his idea.

We had the Bay of Pigs during my stay there. Mexico was not very happy with that operation. But I remember having lunch — one of those typical long, four to five hour luncheons — with a gentleman who was President Mateos's private secretary and a rather influential man. His name was Romero. After scotch-and sodas, red wine, white wine, cognac, he was quite talkative. So was I, as a matter of fact. Anyway, the lunch started about 2:30 and it was about six o'clock when I popped the question. I said, “Umberto, now tell me, what would have been President Mateos's reaction if President Kennedy had decided when he saw that the Bay of Pigs operation was faltering to go all the way and send in the Marines and the Air Force and get it over with?” He said, “Valli, I'll tell you what my president would have said. My president would have called a special session of the Mexican congress and would have denounced, in no uncertain terms, this flagrant intervention in the internal affairs of a sister country. And after making his speech and returning home he would have said to me, 'Thank God that those Yankees had the balls to get the son of a bitch out of Cuba! As God is my witness.'”

And that, my friend Cliff, is the story of Latin America. They denounce us but when you take an action like this...they will never publicly support you in something like this, but I am convinced that had we somehow or other managed to get rid of Ortega, we would have had all these denunciations and many of the leaders in Latin America would be very relieved that this is no longer a problem that they have to cope with.

So — issues. Relations were not very, very good at the time. But with Mexico we've always had a sort of a love-hate type of relationship. But the key issue was at that time Cuba, during most of my stay and our trying to get Mexico to take a stronger stand and their resisting it. Basically this was the principal issue we were coping with.

My stay in Mexico was interrupted briefly because the Agency asked me to be escort officer for the Glenn capsule. We were going to show it in Bogota, Lima, Santiago, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Rio, and end up in Mexico City. I traveled with the capsule — not in the capsule — and was interviewed on television and was sort of the official guide. That was great fun. It was a huge success. I remember in Rio, particularly, the Russians happened to have a space exhibit showing models of capsules. But we had the real McCoy, so that was one-upmanship.

Another story involving Mexico which I think is fun. I had an office in Mexico City with two doors. One door led to my secretary's office and the other one was in back so I could sneak out when there was somebody outside waiting for me that I didn't want to see. It used to drive my secretary crazy. She was Millie Xiarhos, now married to Ambassador Jorden. One day the phone rings and it's an American voice that says, “I'd like to speak to the information officer.” “Oh, you mean Mr. Vallimarescu.” “I guess so if he's the information officer.” She buzzes me. I'm not in, I had snuck out. She said, “I'm sorry, he's not here, but maybe one of his assistants can help you — Mr. Zischke.” “Who?” “Mr. Zischke.” “Well, I'll see if he can help me.” So she tries to find Zischke and can't find him. So Millie is really embarrassed because she wants to be helpful. She says to this gentleman, “I'm embarrassed, because Mr. Zischke is not here either. Maybe I can help you.” So the guy thinks for a while and says, “What's your name?” “My name is Xiarhos.” (Laughter) “Is this the American Embassy,” he asked? And Millie, who is very outspoken, says, “Of course it is, that's what America is all about!” (Laughter)

1961: To The Dominican Republic-Country Public Affairs Officer

Q: So you went from...

VALLIMARESCU: From Mexico to the Dominican Republic. We had three weeks in Mexico City of despedidas...farewells...breakfasts, luncheons, cocktails and dinners. Breakfasts were usually stag and so were luncheons. One thing I don't particularly like — I

admit it publicly now — is hot Mexican food. I was not a great fan of hot Mexican food. And of course at all these breakfasts they would give me these heuvos rancheros, which are eggs with a lot of chili, and I had to eat every bit of it. And during the speeches, they'd say, “Valli likes Mexico and everything Mexican.” Well, we arrived in the Dominican Republic...it was a direct transfer...and I was sick for a week. (Laughter)

Immediate Post-Trujillo Period: American Policy Mistakes Lead To Disaster And Eventually Chaos

Now, in the Dominican Republic it was a very interesting period because we had broken relations with the Dominican Republic during the last year of Trujillo who had been assassinated a year before I arrived. The country was being run by a civilian junta headed up by a very distinguished elderly gentleman, a lawyer, Bonelli, and they were getting ready, presumably, to have elections. Our ambassador, John Bartlow Martin, was a writer and journalist of sorts from Chicago, a political appointee and a decent gentleman, but he didn't know much about the outside world, really. The principal issue during my first few months there was the election issue because the ambassador and Washington wanted to have free, democratic, US-style elections in the Dominican Republic immediately, if not sooner. I took a different position in writing and orally. I said, “These people are 75 percent illiterate. They've had 40 years of brutal dictatorship. They don't know what it means to have a free election. Why don't we let this junta, which is a decent, civilized junta, stay in power for a while and we help build up the institutions, help them economically, educate them a bit? You're going to have an election overnight? They don't know what it means. They'll vote for anybody.” But I did not prevail.

So we put out comic books about how to vote, pamphlets on voting procedures, etc. We had an election and Mr. Juan Bosch was elected president of the Dominican Republic — someone I never trusted. Mr. Bosch, after he had been elected, left the country for awhile. He took office about two months later. He went on a trip and came back two days before his inauguration. He was supposed to be met triumphantly at the airport, but there

was such a mob scene they decided to take him by helicopter to the headquarters of the Dominican radio and television studios where he would make a speech to the people.

Alice and I had in our house three American journalists from the 50 or so who had come for the inauguration. One was Phil Geyelin, who was then with the Wall Street Journal, and who later became head of the editorial page of the Washington Post. Another was Bob Novak and the third I don't remember. None of them spoke Spanish. We decided to sit down by the pool in front of the television set and hear Juan Bosch's speech. I didn't interpret as it went along, I told them I'd give them a summary at the end. After the speech Bob Novak asked me, “All right now, Val, what did he say?” I said, “Before I tell you in detail what he said, I want to tell you that he just committed political suicide.” “Why do you say this?” “Because he has denounced, in the most outrageously violent terms, three sectors of Dominican society without which he will not be able to govern: the church, the armed forces, and what he called the oligarchy. He has committed political suicide.” Phil Geyelin asked me, “Do you mean you don't think he's going to serve out his four-year term?” I said, “No way!” “Well, how much time would you guess?” “I'd say maybe eight months or so.” Well, after nine months he was overthrown. To this day, Bob Novak and Phil Geyelin remember that I gave them a scoop. Obviously they didn't quote me, but they wrote that well-informed observers felt that Mr. Bosch was not going to last out his term of office or maybe not even one year.

Well, this was the principal issue then. During my one and a half years in the Dominican Republic it was basically Juan Bosch and the political instability in the Dominican Republic. It just so happened that the ambassador and the political section of the embassy hitched their star, our star, totally to Juan Bosch, ignoring even the political opposition...the people who were, shall we say, a little more conservative. The ambassador was sort of a pet of Bosch. He followed Bosch, he went everywhere Bosch went. Whatever Bosch wanted, Bosch got. I issued warnings — again, in writing and orally — saying, “This man cannot be trusted.” “Oh, no, he's very democratic, very pro-American.” I said, “No, sir, he's not. I know him better than you do.” The ambassador used to send me on missions to Bosch

and I knew from friends that he made fun of the ambassador and of the United States in his intimate circle.

Well, Juan Bosch was a catastrophe. He was overthrown. He was overthrown by the military, and they set up a three-man civilian junta. Our reaction was to suspend diplomatic relations, withdraw the ambassador and leave a skeleton staff. I was part of the skeleton. We had a charg# d'affaires whom you knew, Spencer King. All right, we suspend relations. The ambassador, at the airport, when we said goodbye to him, said to me, “Val, you'll see, the people of the Dominican Republic will rise up in arms, outraged by this military coup.” I said, “Mr. Ambassador, haven't you learned anything in the year and a half you've been here? They're not going to rise up in arms. They didn't know what they were voting for. Bosch made a lot of promises. They see that he hasn't really delivered, so they'll say, 'Well, good riddance, maybe the next ones will do better.'”

Well, obviously they didn't rise up in arms. The worse part was that we suspended aid and withdrew our massive AID mission that we had there. Again this was a tragic mistake and I fought against it because once you withdraw these 50, 60 people and destroy the infrastructure, to start up any aid program again would take months and months. So we really had no diplomatic relations with them.

When Kennedy was assassinated we were in Santo Domingo and the embassy organized a service at the cathedral. The entire three-man junta, all of whom were personal friends of mine and very decent people — one of whom was foreign minister again until recently — were all there at the church. They paid their respects to the charg# and to all of us. After the service one of them, Donald Reed Cabral, who at the time was chairman of the junta, asked to come to our house for a drink. After we talked about the tragedy he said, “Val, if you have any influence can you see if relations can be renewed? Now there is a chance, because there will be a new president, Johnson, for you to renew relations with us. Our economic, financial situation is terrible now and if something isn't done there will be total chaos and the real gorillas will take over.” Well, I reported on this to Spencer King.

Johnson did decide. It was one of his first moves to renew relations with the Dominican Republic and to resume aid. Well, obviously the aid program was taking a long time to make its effect. By 1965, I wasn't there any more, the situation had deteriorated to such a point that you had the Cama#o revolt, and we had to send in the Marines...

Q: And the ambassador was calling Washington from under his desk.

VALLIMARESCU: That's right. But I — Monday morning quarter- back — think it could have been avoided. The whole issue was Bosch and the whole question of support for Bosch or a more even-handed approach to the situation. The price of sugar and the sugar quota was always a problem, but the big issue was Bosch.

Q: It's pure speculation, of course, but do you think a career man would have made the same mistakes that Martin made, being sort of a puppy dog for Bosch?

VALLIMARESCU: I don't think so. Although his principal adviser was a man who has since become a very close friend, Harry Shlaudeman — who later on was my ambassador in Buenos Aires. We are very close friends now. But Harry Shlaudeman — you know, errare humanum est — he pushed the ambassador in that direction. We had such terrible disagreements that our two wives once almost had to separate us because we almost came to blows over this issue, the support for Bosch. Support for Bosch, fine, but don't act as if the ambassador were a puppy dog.

I'll make a parenthesis here. We were very, very antagonistic, Harry and I, on this issue. Years later, when I was in Paris, in 1967 or '68, Harry Shlaudeman comes to Paris on his way to Sofia where he was opening the embassy there. He stayed with us. We take him out to dinner in Les Halles, in a wonderful little restaurant that specializes in wild boar. I invited colleagues from the political section so the dinner was...well, they were almost all State Department, about six of them and their wives. Harry was enjoying himself, feeling no pain. We all had drunk a lot of good wine. He gets up to make a toast. His toast was,

“To Val, who was right in the Dominican Republic when most of us were wrong.” Mind you, he was talking to his peers. We were good friends but not just because of that.

1963: By Request Of Assistant Secretary Of State Thomas Mann, Vallimarescu Recalled To Washington As Public Affairs Adviser For Latin American Bureau, Department of State

So Johnson becomes president and one of his first appointments was Tom Mann as assistant secretary for Inter-American Affairs. I had been in the Dominican Republic for a year and a half when I got a phone call from Tom Mann, saying, “Val, I want you back here in Washington to be public affairs adviser in ARA.” “All right, you're the boss.” So we left the Dominican Republic a year and a half before we should have and I was back in Washington as public affairs adviser to Tom Mann, on loan from USIA. We are talking '63 to '66.

A.The Return Of The Island Of Chamizal In The Rio Grande To Mexico- Mexican and U.S. Presidents Meet In Middle Of Bridge Connecting Two Countries- The Ordeal Of The Two Chairs

It was while I was public affairs adviser in ARA that we returned the Chamizal to Mexico. I told you it was just a small island in the Rio Grande, but very important to the Mexicans. A big ceremony was planned in El Paso. President Johnson was going down for it and President Mateos was coming up. I was sent down again to help with press arrangements. The two presidents were meeting in the middle of the bridge and then Johnson would escort Mateos onto the U.S. side where the waiting press and dignitaries were seated. I arrived at the site and there was a stage and rows of chairs in front of it. On the stage was a huge armchair, very tall which looked like a throne. Next to it was a small folding chair. In the front rows of the audience were the Mexican press, many of whom recognized me. They got up and came to me screaming, saying, “This is terrible, this is terrible! You might as well keep your damn Chamizal!” I said, “What's terrible?” “That throne for Johnson and

the little folding chair for our president.” They said, “This is an insult. This is terrible. You should have two chairs of the same size. Valli, you must do something.”

I could see their point right away. I tried to find somebody and saw someone from the Secret Service with the little pin in his lapel. I said, “We've got to change the chairs.” “What do you mean? This is the President's chair.” “I can't explain. Who's in charge?” “Ambassador Biddle.” “Where's Ambassador Biddle?” “He's on the bridge.” “Get him for me.” “Well, we'll try. You really feel it's important?” “I tell you it's essential.” So he gets on his walkie-talkie and finds Biddle finally on the bridge waiting for the two presidents. I said, “Tony, we've got a real problem.” “What's the problem?” “The chair. You've got a throne for the president and a little folding chair for Mateos, who's shorter anyway. And this, I tell you, my friend, this will be a major public relations political disaster.” “You say so, Val?” “I say so.” “Okay, get me the Secret Service guy on the phone.” The guy gets on the phone. “Remove the throne! Put two chairs of the same size.” So finally they removed the throne and they find two chairs — not folding ones — and I get a standing ovation from the Mexican reporters. And the ceremony takes place.

I didn't have a return ticket for Washington that day, it was full, so I had to stay a day and a half in El Paso. My Mexican friends told me, “Hey, why don't you fly with us in the press plane to Mexico City and stay there a day and a half or two days?” I had a friend there, Simone Racotta, and said that that makes sense. Why should I stay in El Paso? So I called Alice and said, “Look, this is the problem.” “Oh, great, you go there and stay there with Simone. You give her my love.” So I get into the press plane with them and fall asleep. All of a sudden I hear music. I wake up and in the aisle, all bunched up, were these journalists singing Las Ma#anitas, which is a song they sing on birthdays. They had cut out of cardboard a chair and had found a ribbon and were decorating me with the Order of the Chair — la Orden de la Silla.

When all hell broke loose in the Dominican Republic, I participated once in a meeting, 24 hours after this happened, with Tom Mann, President Johnson and a few other people.

Tom Mann turned to me and said, “Val, would you send the Marines if you were President of the United States?” I said, “Yes, Mr. Secretary, by all means I would. But we should have OAS participation.” Well, this was the consensus.

B.Chaos In Santo Domingo—Send The Marines! Send Vallimarescu!

Then there was a nightmarish week when I was sent down to the Dominican Republic to be the spokesman. It couldn't have come at a worse time for me because Alice's mother was dying of cancer, and she had just been called to leave for Romania the day before I was called to go off to the DR, so the children were alone. I'm called in the morning of the day after Alice left by the deputy USIA director. Carl Rowan was director, but I don't remember who was deputy at the time. He said, “Val, we want you to leave for the Dominican Republic today.” “But I can't, my children are in school...”

Q: But how could the USIA deputy director order you out when you were working for Tom Mann?

VALLIMARESCU: Well, I guess they had consulted. Anyway he said that they wanted me down there and to leave that afternoon. I said, “Well, I have to find a baby sitter.” “We'll do anything necessary. Do you know anyone who could take care of your kids?” I said, “Well, there's Mrs. Visoianu who was working at the Voice.” “Well, we'll get the Voice to release her for as long as necessary.” Well, Mrs. Visoianu didn't feel she could do it. But there was another Romanian lady who was contacted. I didn't see my boys that day, I left at 4 o'clock before they came back from school. I left them a note.

We took off at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and arrived in Santo Domingo. I remember we were in a helicopter with door open and Marines with submachine guns pointed at the ground. We heard shooting all over the place. We landed on the embassy residence grounds. I found total mayhem and chaos. The Marines had established a security perimeter around Santo Domingo and the commander in chief of the combined forces was General Palmer. Our ambassador was Tap Bennett. My job, of course, was to brief

the press every day — the 4 o'clock follies. The whole situation was so nightmarish and I didn't do very well. I was greatly pre- occupied about Alice, whose mother had died in the meantime. She never made it in time to see her. The children were alone. My main problem was that I couldn't get information. I couldn't get General Palmer or Tap Bennett to tell me what they were up to. My first two briefings were very successful. I remember once I referred to the Cama#o forces as “the enemy,” and one wise guy said, “Oh, an enemy. You call Cama#o an enemy?” I said, “Well, people who shoot at you are generally not your friends.” They liked that.

Anyway, the first two briefings were all right, pretty good. But then they started expanding the security perimeter without telling me, the press spokesman. Then statements were made in Washington by President Johnson that the Cama#o people were murdering civilians right and left, and the streets of Santo Domingo, or the sector controlled by them, were littered with corpses. They gave out, in Washington, lists of names of people who had been killed, executed. They gave out, without my knowing, lists of Cuban agents who had been identified and who were with Cama#o. I remember I was faced by questions: Is it true that the streets of Santo Domingo are littered with corpses? Is it true that the Cuban agents — and so on. This was the first I had heard that this statement had been made by the White House. Nobody would tell me. You can imagine what it is to brief journalists who are more informed about what's going on than you are.

The third day, at the request of one or two foreign embassies which had not been included in the security perimeter, General Palmer decided to enlarge the security perimeter, which involved some clashes with the Cama#o forces. So I'm faced by Bob Berrelez of the AP. He says, “Hey, Val, why did they enlarge the perimeter?” “Wha, wha, what? What perimeter?” I had been in the residence with General Palmer and at General Palmer's head- quarters, and they never told me. I told Washington to tell them to keep me informed or I would give up.

So about the fourth day I was a nervous wreck and had a briefing session. I am informed that, in order to help me, John King would come from the State Department. John King was then working for the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, and he came down to help me. I remember I was in a building where I had temporary offices, and John arrived looking perfectly neat with tie and coat, very distinguished looking. He sat down at a desk before an open window. I was a nervous wreck.

I had started a new technique. I tried not to have regular 4 o'clock briefings but to brief as many individual journalists whom I knew, individually, and that was working out pretty well. But I had scheduled for that day a 4 or 5 o'clock press briefing, and John King was going to be there to help me. He said, “You know, Val, it is very important that this come out well because my boss's career is at stake. If it doesn't come out well he may lose his job.” I said, “Fella, do you realize what's going on here?” And all of a sudden they're shooting. I said, “Duck, John, duck!” He did duck. Two bullets came in through the window - bullets which I presented to Carl Rowan when I came back. (Laughter) John says, “Oh, my God, this is really serious!” And I said, “You'd better believe it's serious!”

We get down to the briefing, and I must say I couldn't cope with it — although people who saw it on television said I did well. I couldn't cope with it. John King was sitting there and I said, “I'm sorry ladies and gentlemen, but Mr. King is going to take over.” I had no more briefings after that and I went back. Hew Ryan came down. He was then the USIA area director of Latin America. It was not one of my better moments. Although Bruce Van Voorst in Newsweek had some words of praise for me — but that was in the very beginning — but said, in effect, that it was quite obvious that Val, who is a good professional and a man who is respected by all the press, really was not informed as to what was going on.

Q: Why didn't they inform you? Why didn't they keep you up to date?

VALLIMARESCU: I don't know. I really don't know. Looking back on it, Palmer, as a military man, considered all these movements military movements, not to be known to the press. And Tap Bennett, largely because he had lost control of the situation was scared, panicked and couldn't focus on this very important priority. And also the problem was that things were being done in Washington. Johnson wanted to prove something — wanted to prove that this was Cuban-originated, wanted to prove that Cama#o was a real s.o.b. and was murdering people — and they released things that could not be checked on. Some of the supposed Cuban agents were non-existent or were dead.

Q: Where was the White House getting its information?

VALLIMARESCU: From the other agency, I guess. I don't know. It was a mess. It was a mess. But I do remember there was one positive thing to it; it was not all negative. There was a man named Hector Garcia Godoy. The important thing was that once the Cama#o thing was almost finished — the military operation was fairly successful — we and others were looking for someone to become president of the Dominican Republic. Someone with good credentials, someone honest, a man of integrity. The one man whose name came up most often was Hector Garcia Godoy, whom we had known very, very well. He had been ambassador to London and came back to the Dominican Republic to have a big job in the foreign office when we were there in our previous incarnation.

Hector lived across the street from what had been my residence when I was PAO and which was my residence this time. After I gave up on the press briefings, after five days, I stayed on for another four or five days. Hew Ryan was there and he gave me some assignments, writing stuff.

So, Hector Garcia Godoy lived across the street. One night I went over there, dropped in uninvited. He gave me a big abrazo and we spoke for three or four hours. I said, “Hector, you are the only one who is respected enough by all sides, who can take over as president. Accept the presidency and save the Dominican Republic.” He was very

reluctant. He didn't know if he could carry it off. I think I helped there because he did accept the presidency. He was ambassador to Washington after that and later he died of cancer. As a matter of fact, I saw his widow when I got married to Barbara in the Dominican Republic; I saw his widow and his brother-in-law. So, anyway, that was one positive aspect of my rather nightmarish visit during that period: I think I helped convince Hector Garcia Godoy to become president of the Dominican Republic.

1966: Paris, Deputy Public Affairs Officer. Chip Bohlen As Ambassador Is Wonderful, But Shriver Comes After Two Years And Is A Disaster

So I go back to Washington after this experience. Tom Mann eventually is replaced as assistant secretary by Jack Hood Vaughn, the former Peace Corps director, who was in the job for a year, after which he was appointed ambassador to Colombia or Panama. He is replaced by Lincoln Gordon, who had been ambassador to Brazil. At which point I go to Leonard Marks, who had replaced Carl Rowan, and say, “Leonard, please, three different assistant secretaries within less than three years is a little too much to adjust to. Send me overseas, please. I'd like to go overseas again.” “Where would you like to go?” “Well, if you really ask me, I'd like to go to Paris.” “Let me see if I can work it out.” And he worked it out. I remember that the press corps, the journalists who covered the State Department, gave me a luncheon, which Tom Mann and Jack Hood Vaughn attended, at the National Press Club. And they represented a wide range, from Bernie Gwertzman to Jerry O'Leary, the New York Times guy — there must have been about 20 journalists there. It made me feel good because they were people who were enemies, basically ideologically different, but they got together to say goodbye to me, and I was very pleased.

So off we go to Paris. This is June, 1966. There's a story there which show how bureaucracy works, or how some people in the bureaucracy work. We wanted to go by ship; we thought it would be nice to take four days by ship. We had made reservations on the SS United States. The kids were very excited about it. Alice was, too. But then we hear from the PAO, Lee Brady. He said, “No way. I need Val here, I want him by plane.”

It was only a two-day difference. There was a French religious holiday during that period we were talking about a two-day difference, but Brady insisted. We had to cancel our ship reservations. We arrived in Paris on a Saturday. Monday was a holiday and I reported to the office on Tuesday. We would have arrived by ship on Tuesday. That was not a very auspicious start.

I was in Paris for three years as deputy PAO. It should have been a four-year tour. The reason it was not a four-year tour is that my second ambassador in Paris and I were not on the best of terms. I think he asked that I be pulled out. I know I asked to be pulled out. I don't know which of the two came first. This ambassador was Sargent Shriver. We didn't get along very well. My first ambassador in Paris was Chip Bohlen, and that was a great gentleman. And she was a great lady. But it was quite clear that Chip Bohlen's heart was always still in the Soviet Union, in Eastern European affairs.

It was a difficult period in Franco-American relations. De Gaulle had pulled out of NATO. Anti-Americanism was at its height in the media. All the more leftist elements were having a field day, going to extremes. They felt that de Gaulle had given them a green light. I was deputy PAO, but the job of our press, radio, television people was a very difficult one indeed because the French media were not very responsive. It was very difficult indeed. My children and my wife — and I love Paris too — were very happy. I was quite pleased with Chip Bohlen the first two years. But the last year I wanted to get out. The city is pretty, and everything is enjoyable, but if you go to work disliking the person you work for it's not fun.

Of course, we were there when the famous events of May took place in 1968 when the students sort of went up in arms and occupied various buildings and there were serious incidents between them and the police. De Gaulle went into exile, in effect, refused to have anything to do with it and then finally, after the thing became totally unmanageable, came back and order was reestablished.

But when Shriver came the whole embassy morale, the whole embassy spirit suffered greatly. First of all it started with his telling his DCM, who was a very nice gentleman who had kept the embassy together as charg# for six to eight months — within a month or two after Shriver had presented his credentials, the DCM sees in the traffic, in a telegram, that the political counselor had been recalled to Washington, although he had another three years to go. The economic counselor was also being pulled out and the first he knew of it was in reading the traffic, as we call it. So the DCM walks into the ambassador's office and says, “Mr. Ambassador, what's this I hear about so-and-so and so-and-so being pulled?” The ambassador looked at him with a smile and said, “That's right. And you, too! You're leaving within a week.” That's the way he fired his DCM. So it didn't help morale in the embassy.

As I say, the Sargent Shriver period was difficult for us. Now Sargent Shriver is a man with ideas a mile a minute, which is fine, he was an imaginative man — but, you know, I developed for Shriver — I recognized that I was no longer objective. Just as— I always made that comparison — just as in the days of the McCarthy era, it was enough for McCarthy to denounce somebody publicly as a communist, or whatever, for me to react and say, “That must be a nice guy.” You see what I mean? It's sort of exaggerated, but with Sargent Shriver it was enough for him to have an idea for me to say, “Oh-oh, there must be something wrong with it.” So I was not totally objective.

If you're still interested in anecdotes, I will tell you some which illustrate the Sargent Shriver way of doing things. Number one, he was always, always at least half an hour late for every appointment, whether it was with Pompidou or the minister of foreign affairs — always at least a half hour late. You remember Guy Faure, who was minister of education. After 20 minutes he gave instructions that when the ambassador of the United States arrives tell him I'm busy. One day the ambassador calls into his office the PAO and me along with the information officer and press attach#. He said, “I'd like to know how you people feel I'm doing my job. Is there anything I'm not doing well?” The PAO said, “Well,

Mr. Ambassador, if you say so, yes. One of the things that is rather objectionable from the French point of view is the fact that you arrive so late for your appointments. Why?" "I used to campaign with my brother-in-law, Bob Kennedy, and we arrived at campaign meetings an hour late and nobody minded." That's the comparison he made.

One day at a staff meeting the PAO was not there so I was attending the country team meeting, which is all the counselors plus the press attach#. The press attach# was Bill Payeff, who has a marvelous sense of humor, sort of a Buster Keaton sense of humor. With a straight face he will say something and you're never quite sure whether he's joking or serious. Well, this was a few months before George Washington's birthday and the ambassador wanted to do something special. One of the ideas that was very good — he had good contacts — he was going to bring memorabilia from museums in the U.S. and exhibit them in the embassy chancery lobby and some of them in the residence. The other thing he said he was going to do for two or three days leading up to George Washington's birthday was to dress up the Marines in period costumes. (Laughter) There was a big silence. And then Bill Payeff, again with a straight face, said, "Well, that's fine Mr. Ambassador, but where are you going to get the men?" "What do you mean, where am I going to get the men?" "Well, all the men you'll need to hold down the Marines while you dress them up in those silly costumes!" Well, we laughed. The ambassador didn't think it was funny at all. But he didn't dress the Marines in the costumes.

Another story. The ambassador was a great tennis fan and he had a very good idea. The U.S. Davis Cup team was going to play in England. He was going to bring them to France and have them tour several cities in France and play exhibition matches and have clinics and end up in Paris. That was a fine idea. So at a residence party, where the Prefect of Paris, sort of like the governor of Paris — a very distinguished old gentleman with a great sense of humor — was present... Shriver thought he spoke French and insisted on speaking French even to the French Foreign Minister, Couve de Murville, who was absolutely bilingual in English. He spoke good social French, but he didn't really speak French. I see the ambassador with the Prefect and him waving to me. I go over. He said,

“Val, I need your help. I was telling M. le Prefet about my tennis plan and about the fact that these tennis stars would end up in Paris. And I thought we should have an exhibition match on the Place de la Concorde. (Laughter) We could paint the tennis court on the Place de la Concorde.”

I turned to the Prefect and said, “The ambassador says that he would like to have this exhibition match on the Place de la Concorde.” The Prefect laughed and said, “Oh, your ambassador has a great sense of humor.” Shriver asked, “What did he say?” I said, “He said you have a great sense of humor, Mr. Ambassador.” “What does he mean? I'm serious. Tell him I'm serious.” “L'ambassadeur est serieux, M. le Prefet.” “Then will you explain to the ambassador, please, that there are certain problems to that. Number one, the Place de la Concorde is a historic monument, respected as such. One does not paint tennis courts or anything there. Number two, it is one of the busiest traffic centers because there are avenues coming from all over. It would create a massive traffic jam everywhere. And number three, it can't be done.” “Mr. Ambassador,” he said, “it can't be done for these reasons.” “Oh, I see. Well then we could do it on the Place du l'Hotel de Ville.” (Where the municipal building is.) So the Prefect says, “Will you tell the ambassador that for the same reasons—it is also a historic monument and traffic also would be a problem.” But then he winks at me and say, “Tell the ambassador that I offer him the Place des Vosges.” The Place des Vosges is a jewel, but it's fenced with a garden — trees, flowers in the middle — beautiful. You can't do anything there, you'd have to cut down all the trees. So the ambassador said, “You thank the Prefect. That's fine. Val, tomorrow we go.” I say, “All right, Mr. Ambassador, we'll go.” So we drive out to the Place des Vosges. He gets out and says, “That son of a bitch! He was pulling my leg, wasn't he Val?” I said, “Yes, Mr. Ambassador, he was.” (Laughter) These were some of Sargent Shriver's ideas.

One of the sadder ones is that at another staff meeting — again I was acting PAO...it was June, right after his brother-in-law, Bobby Kennedy, had been assassinated — we discussed the Fourth of July reception. The ambassador said, “Eunice and I are going to do it differently this year. There's a very good rock band of young students,

and we're going to have a rock band. Everybody can dance and it'll be totally informal. We'll take out all this old, dusty furniture and it'll be something like Paris has never seen." Well, all the counselors looked at each other. I'm public relations, public affairs. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I am afraid that the French would not understand the American ambassador giving a rock dancing party less than a month after his brother-in-law had been assassinated." He said, "Well, the show must go on." I said, "Yes, but also, Mr. Ambassador, the people who get invited to Fourth of July receptions are generally not great fans of rock and roll. They're the foreign minister, the minister of economy, the minister of education, members of parliament, members of the Senate, foreign ambassadors." "Well, does anybody else agree with Val?" They finally spoke up. The economic counselor said, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador, I think it would be misinterpreted." So we had the usual Fourth of July reception. That was Sargent Shriver.

Well, I left after three years. The last year in Paris was when the Vietnam peace talks started. A good friend of mine, Bill Jorden, was sent by the president to be the official spokesman. We had daily press briefings, but we were only indirectly involved in this operation; we were supportive. There were lots of journalists from all over. There must have been about a thousand or fifteen hundred newsmen covering those peace talks. So it was an exciting time in many ways, but as deputy PAO I did feel a little frustrated because I was more of an administrator than I was a participant, and my cup of tea is to be right in there.

1969: Vallimarescu's Incompatibility With Shriver Leads To Early Termination Of Paris Assignment. Back To Washington And Head Of European Division, VOA

But we did have a visitor. We had President Nixon's first foreign visit in my last year there. That was quite an experience because the advance party was composed of people like Ehrlichman and his assistant Edward Morgan and we didn't know who they were. They were obnoxious, and totally inexperienced. I had been involved with three previous foreign

presidential visits, but they thought they knew it all. The visit came off all right because USIS is professional. It was a great success.

So, we're back in Paris, July 1969, winding up in Paris, and getting ready to return — this time by boat. It was the last trip that the SS United States made. After that it went out of business. It was a great trip. Well, not really. Alice was depressed because she didn't want to leave Paris. John, my older boy, had begun to go steady with a lovely girl. The younger one, Dan, played the guitar with friends in cafes. So they were sad. I was dancing, going around the ship playing ping pong, and these people all had long faces, my family.

So we arrived in Washington. I didn't have a job. We stayed with friends for a while until we could move into our house. Dick Cushing was then deputy director of VOA, actually acting director. Dick had been my boss as deputy PAO in Mexico in the last year or two there and I thought we didn't get along too well, but it turned out I was wrong. Dick calls me one day. I think I went to the Voice looking for a job — I'm not sure how it went. Dick says, “Hey, we may have an opening in the Latin American Division.” I said, “Sure, I'd be glad to have the Latin American Division, or any job at the Voice.” Finally it was the European Division, because Lem Graves, the Latin American Division chief, didn't go when he was supposed to. I ended up being chief of the European Division of the Voice, with Bob Warner as my deputy. I was in that job from '69 to '71 when I became program manager.

And there comes a story involving you, Cliff Groce, if you remember. The first performance rating that you wrote on me was a good performance rating but expressed some reservations about my willingness to follow policy. And when I objected to it, Ronny Ronalds said, “Work it out.”

Q: I can tell the story better than you can.

VALLIMARESCU: Okay, you tell the story.

Q: There were three points in the phrasing that you said you were afraid might affect your future, and that if I could make the same points in different language, you were prepared to live with the points. I said, "Well, let me look at it." You had looked at it over the weekend; you had already signed the thing. So I looked at it and decided I could certainly rephrase it so not to prejudice your career. So you signed it again and that was the end of it.

VALLIMARESCU: Yeah. What I also remember is that then I became program manager. And I think you were a little bit concerned.

Q: I was quite concerned.

VALLIMARESCU: And you talked to Bob Warner to find out what kind of a guy I was — was I vindictive? And I remember we sat down together, you and I, and I said, "Let bygones be bygones. Let's see if we can work together." And we worked together beautifully. (Laughter) That was a very positive story.

Q: Well, it is fairly unusual to go from being a supervisor of a person to being the person's deputy. But before we get too far into the new job, let's talk some more about the European Division. I mean, you were among old friends.

Problems Of Inter-Ethnic Conflict Within The Voice

VALLIMARESCU: I was among old friends. And I knew that the Czechs hated the Slovaks, that the Bulgarians hated each other, that there were problems in the Romanian Service. Eastern Europeans are very difficult people in many ways. And then, of course, the Latvians and the Lithuanians and the Estonians were ultra, ultra, ultra nationalistic, patriotic — which is find, but....

One of our problems, as you know — and one of the problems that caused your first performance rating — I reflected my personal views, but I also reflected the views of many people in the European Division as to what the Voice of America's job was and how news

should be handled. And that was a bone of contention all the time — and probably always has been.

I felt very strongly, and articulated it strongly, as you said in your performance rating, that while the Voice of America should reflect America, warts and all, we should make an effort not to emphasize the warts and to be a little more positive in our approach. I felt that we were not the New York Times of the air, or the Washington Post of the air; that while we should report all the important news, we did not have to always lead our news shows with what happened to be a big story here, which was often the case. Let's assume the big story in the States was a lynching in the south. We should report that lynching in the south, but we should not lead with it. That was a continuous bone of contention with friends with whom I remained friends, like Bernie Kamenske, because I felt and still feel that the Voice of America, whether we liked it or not, is viewed by our listeners as reflecting the official views of the United States. Therefore, everything we said, even in our commentaries, had to be written and thought out with that in mind.

Q: Especially in our commentaries.

VALLIMARESCU: Especially in our commentaries. I can say that's a battle I had when I was chief of the European Division, when I was program manager, when I was deputy director of the Voice — when I was head of the Romanian Service. We had our ups and downs. One of the items that was mentioned in your performance rating reflects exactly that.

This was, you remember, the Vietnam war. There were anti-war demonstrations everywhere and there were occasionally some, I wouldn't say pro-war, but demonstrations supporting the president. One was the famous construction workers' demonstration in New York City, which was a pretty massive demonstration. There were some good speeches. Well, that demonstration was something like item five in the news and absurdly short. I raised hell, and I had an argument with Bill Haratunian about it, I remember, because

I felt that if we led with anti-war demonstrations, when there was a pro-administration demonstration, we should also play it up high. But that's to summarize a little bit my approach to what the Voice was all about.

One of the Services that gave me the greatest headaches, if you remember, was the Bulgarian Service. There was a terrible war going on in there. The chief was a very nice man, Gene Prostov, but there were terrible tensions between him and Boyan Planinsky — I don't know what he was, maybe the deputy editor — and they were almost coming to blows. I remember trying persuasion. I called them all in and read them the riot act. I told them that if they did not straighten out their own affairs I would take disciplinary measures against individual members. I remember I was really hopping mad and kept them in my office for about an hour. I told them they were irresponsible and acting like children, that what they were doing was destroying the effective- ness of their broadcasts. It was the first time I really lost my temper with an entire Service. They straightened out for a while but I think the infighting resumed.

You always had problems with the Baltic Services trying to curb their excessive enthusiasm and nationalism — you can see it now in the Soviet Union. These were the type of people...

Q: But they were wonderful people.

VALLIMARESCU: They were delightful, all delightful. What was needed, of course, was a little young blood. And eventually you got it.

With the Romanians I had to suppress my previous incarnation. It was a difficult situation because it was very easy to try to run the Romanian Service since I had run it before.

Then we had the Polish Service with a very authoritarian chief, Joe Gydynski, who was resented by many of his staffers. But I think basically it was a good Service with good

programs. The Hungarian Service was probably the best. Paul Nadanyi and then of course Joe Takacs...

Q: Who was summarily removed from the job this last year, accused of having tampered with the test results of a woman applying for a job with the Service. I don't believe it. I just don't believe that Joe would do that. He was transferred to the External Relations office, so he's no longer in the program business.

VALLIMARESCU: He was first-rate.

Q: I thought he was a candidate for the Division chief job.

VALLIMARESCU: Yes, you're right, the Hungarian Service was the best. The Czechoslovak Service was pretty good, too, and the Czech-Slovak friction was not as intense by the time I had become chief of the Division as it had been when I was in New York. It was much worse then. Much more tension than now.

Q: VOA has been bombarded for years by the Slovak Alliance of America proposing a separate Service for Slovak.

VALLIMARESCU: Yes, we had letters from Congressmen supporting separation.

Q: Was it while you were there that the Congress voted, against the wishes of the Agency, to guarantee the continuation of the 15-minute Slovene broadcast every day?

VALLIMARESCU: Yes. Yes, it happened while I was there. I had forgotten about the Slovenes. That, of course, as you know very well, was one of the problems we always had in the Voice, these special interest groups behind most of these Services. The Romanians never really had a constituency, but certainly the Poles, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Slovenes, the Hungarians did. It was not easy to maintain a balance with all these pressures coming from the ethnic groups themselves and from them through Congressmen. I think on the whole we managed to hold the line pretty well against

exaggerated demands from those groups. On the whole, I think we had a good Division generally, with good, devoted, loyal people.

Vallimarescu Becomes VOA Program Director And Feels More Able To Put Some Of His Own Views Into Programming Format

Q: So when you became program manager, how did you view the job having been on the other end, both in the Romanian Service and at the Division level?

VALLIMARESCU: Well, I felt it was an excellent selection. (laughter)

Q: How did you get picked by Giddens?

VALLIMARESCU: I don't know. One day he just called me into his office and said he had observed me and that he shared some of my views as to what the policy of the Voice news and commentary should be. He felt that it would be very good if someone who had come up from the ranks, had served in a language Service, would assume the program manager's job. Needless to say, I accepted. I saw in it an opportunity to have some of my views prevail.

I never quite succeeded all the way, but I felt, as you know very well, very strongly that the Services should have more latitude in the way they presented the news, that they should not be forced to carry the first three items exactly the way the central news desk put them out, and that battle I won. They were able, with the approval of their division chief, to include certain items that were not in the regular news file but that were relevant to their own audience. This I felt very strongly about.

Problems With VOA Correspondents Who Wanted To Act Like Overseas Wire Service And Newspaper Correspondents Unfettered By Government Control

I also felt that our worldwide correspondents should be a little more aware of who paid them. And by that I mean they got a green check from the U.S. Treasury representing the U.S. taxpayers. And that was a battle. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it.

Q: Some of our people have been, as far as I'm concerned, irresponsible.

VALLIMARESCU: Yes. Well, you see, not all of them but some of them — Mark Hopkins, for example, was an excellent correspondent, as such, but I had a terrible argument with him when I was program manager because he felt that he was really a free-wheeling U.S. correspondent, as if he were the New York Times.

Q: When I came back from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in '71, on that trip that I had with eight other Agency officers, I came through Munich after the Yugoslav part of the trip was over, stopped off in Munich. And he and Zora Safir flew in from Belgrade to Munich in order to take me to dinner and talk. They were going on about how they were oppressed and suppressed and guided and controlled, and I said to them, "You people have more freedom of action than any correspondents I know of." I said, "Your stuff is put out on the wire when it comes in. You're not dictated to by Washington. You're not edited. You have problems with the local PAO in some cases, but," I said, "that's not a problem with VOA." And I said, "It seems to me that you ought to thank your stars for the freedom that you have, editorially, within which to operate." They were just crushed that I was giving them the negative.

VALLIMARESCU: They did have a lot of freedom.

Q: Oh, of course they did. And you know they eventually got married. Zora broke up the Hopkins marriage.

VALLIMARESCU: No, they had a lot of freedom. I remember in my discussion with Mark Hopkins, when he was in Washington one time, I told him, "You know, Mark, you feel that you should have total and complete freedom with no limitation whatsoever, that

you should not be guided by anybody." At the same time, in Munich — I had been in Munich before, seeing Mark who then head the VOA European Bureau — I knew that he thoroughly enjoyed the government-provided apartment; that he was one of the most avid consumers of commissary and PX goods, tax free; that whenever anything went wrong in the apartment — plumbing or whatever — he raised hell with the consulate. So I said, "You know, Mark, you like all these perks. Where do you think all these perks come from? If you want to be a totally free, independent, free-wheeling journalist, move out, go rent yourself a room somewhere. Don't use the commissary. Don't use your official passport." He couldn't have it both ways. And that didn't mean because I was trying to censor him, but we did try to give them some guidance and some of them resented the guidance and considered it as interfering with their freedom of expression.

My relations with Giddens, as you know, were very good. He gave me pretty much a free hand, even later when I became deputy director. I had high affection for Ken Giddens.

Q: The whole Voice did.

VALLIMARESCU: The whole Voice did. He cared. He really cared about the outfit.

But to go back to program manager. I think it was while I was program manager that there was more flexibility allowed to the language Services, which is the way it should have been. I don't know what the situation is like now, but one of the things that I remember about my late VOA career — European Division, program manager, deputy — was the arguments with Bernie Kamenske and Alan Heil, which became quite heated at time, but which were resolved, especially with Bernie Kamenske. Bernie loved arguments because he also loved to make up. He would take you out to lunch and say, "You know, I love you, Val." I guess he's retired now, but he was a good newsman. But we did have very fundamental disagreements on the role of the Voice of America and on how news and commentary should be handled and on the extent to which language servicescould have

the kind of flexibility that a language service should have. I believe they had more while I was there than they had had before.

But, of course, the key was that you had to know, either as program manager or as division chief, very well to what extent the Service chiefs were responsible people.

Q: That's a point I was just about to make. You can't make a blanket freedom law for all the Services because some of the chiefs are not...

VALLIMARESCU: That is a problem.

Q: So you've got to find a balance between the two.

VALLIMARESCU: I think, I'm wracking my brain now, but I think when we gave them this flexibility we did tell them that they had to notify the regional editor in the newsroom and if the regional editor had any problem with it he was not to tell the service chief he couldn't do that but he was to contact the division chief or the program manager or the deputy program manager. I think that's the way it worked.

I think I enjoyed more being division chief and program manager than I enjoyed being deputy director because being deputy director you get involved in things which are not my forte. I'm not very good at budget, I'm not very good at figures, I'm more of a, should I say, substantive, politically-oriented type of a guy.

Q: I'm aware. (Laughter)

VALLIMARESCU: I remember that my beloved secretary, Gladys (Harris), used to chide me because she said I saw anybody who wanted to see me. All these people who had a problem at the Voice. There was one Lithuanian who worked in the Latin American Division as a producer...

Q: Paul Labanauskas.

VALLIMARESCU: Labanauskas. He used to come in and cry on my shoulder. I saw everyone who wanted to cry on my shoulder, even though I couldn't solve their problem most of the time. I think to some extent it helped that one of the big bosses would see them. I certainly discovered, as deputy director, that not only the Europeans had their internal struggles and fights but it was true also of the Asians and the Africans — in a different form. The East Europeans were not unique.

I was program manager till Jim Keogh called to tell me that I was going to be detached, detailed, on loan to the NSC.

Continuation of interview: May 9, 1991

1973: New USIA Director James Keogh Details Vallimarescu To National Security Council (NSC)

Q: You remember that while you were at the NSC, quite a few of us came to see you and had lunch and talked about the situation during the Kingsley period (as program manager). Finally we had the management study, and wound up transferring certain people out. And later you returned as deputy director. What did you do to get that management study established? There was a good deal of resentment in some parts of the organization. You showed me some excerpts from that report but I've never seen the whole thing and I'd really like to get it, because I have high regard for the three guys who did it — Lew Schmidt, Ed Schechter and Jack O'Brien.

VALLIMARESCU: Yes, since you jogged my memory, I remember that I was in the NSC at the time and several of you came to see me and said that the situation was becoming almost traumatic, that Nat Kingsley was playing havoc with the Voice of America, and could I use whatever influence I had on Jim Keogh to see if something could be done. So I did go and see Jim Keogh. He knew of my life-long interest in the Voice of America and of the fact that I had started as a GS-7 and gone up to be program manager. So he decided,

based on the conversation we had, that the thing to do would be to select three respected (retired) members of USIA's Foreign Service and set up this management study. In effect it was like an inspection team — Lew Schmidt, Jack O'Brien, and Ed Schechter.

I now remember that Ken Giddens was quite resentful of this; he thought it was aimed at him, that it was Jim Keogh trying to, in effect, find a reason for getting rid of him. This did not happen to be the case as I had initiated the report. I had the highest affection and regard for Ken Giddens so it was not aimed at him. I remember that they spent several weeks at the Voice, interviewing people from the newsroom, from Worldwide English, from management, from the language services. They came up with a final report which I believe they discussed in general terms with Ken and me. But I don't remember what the final report looked like. I don't have a copy and I don't know where there is one. But I believe that as a result of this management review Nat Kingsley left as program manager. So it accomplished what most people at the Voice wanted to accomplish. That's about my recollection of this event. If you ever find the report, Cliff, I'd be interested in reading it, or I should say re-reading it.

Q: As you say, it did accomplish the basic purpose. I remember that a word that was central to the thing was "coterie"; that the Voice of America was being run by a coterie of people who were in effect undercutting the director himself by doing things that he was not aware of. And sure enough, the members of that coterie were transferred to the filed, and elsewhere.

VALLIMARESCU: That's right. There was a general housecleaning of the coterie. Anyway, I'm glad it worked out that way.

Q: When you were in the NSC for that year of absence from the Agency, what were the major policy issues you dealt with?

VALLIMARESCU: Well, first of all I think it might be interesting to know how I happened to go to the NSC. It was the same man I mentioned earlier, Bill Jorden, who had been

appointed to the NSC as the principal Latin American expert. He headed a three-man team, with two secretaries, which constituted the Latin American section of the NSC. I had worked with him indirectly in Paris. He asked Jim Keogh to assign me to the NSC. Jim agreed because it was considered very good for the Agency to have one of its officers assigned to the NSC. As a matter of fact, I believe I replaced Pete Vaky, who later became ambassador and is now retired. The other member of the staff was a delightful lady, Ms. Brownell, who was a niece of the former Attorney General.

A.Secretary of State Rogers and Henry Kissinger's Manipulations. Crisis In Chile

The principal issue which I was involved in very directly was the situation in Chile. Allende was then president and there was increasing concern, if you remember in the U.S. Government about the influence of the Cubans in the government. They had Cuban advisers running around the place, and Communists from Eastern Europe. The place was crawling with leftists and out-and-out Communists, and there was concern about where Chile was going. That was the principal issue.

But we also had a difficult situation because the Secretary of State was Bill Rogers and the National Security Adviser was Henry Kissinger, also known as Hack because of his initials —HAK. Henry Kissinger was really running U.S. foreign policy, and Bill Rogers always took a back seat. As a matter of fact, I remember that Bill Rogers decided that he wanted to travel to Latin America. He had never been there. So he submitted a formal request to the President for approval of his travel plans.

All these requests came through the National Security Council; in this case, because it was Latin America, it came through out office. Bill Jorden asked me to draft a memo for the President, giving our recommendation, and of course my recommendation was that the request be approved. Here was the Secretary of State who wanted to go to Latin America. Bill Jorden approved it, and it went through Hack, through Kissinger. The next day we got back my memo with a little note from Kissinger saying, “Is this trip really necessary?”

I consulted with Bill, and we responded to Kissinger's memo saying, “Yes, we feel it is very important that the Secretary of State travel to Latin America since he had never been there.” Well, needless to say, the Secretary of State did not travel to Latin America because Henry Kissinger told the President it wasn't necessary. So this is a sort of vignette of how that functioned.

In the case of Chile, there were many things I can't, even today, talk about. But I remember it was something like 5:30 in the morning when the phone ran at home and it was the Situation Room. They said there was some trouble in Santiago. Understatement of the year! Air Force planes were bombing the palace, and it looked as if Allende was in trouble. Bill Jorden was on vacation, so I was really in charge of our little section. I had to wake up Henry Kissinger, and told him it looked like it was very serious. He asked me to call the President — the great thrill of my life — through the White House, which I did. It was by then about 6:30. President Nixon said, “Thank you very much. Have you called Henry?” I said, “Yes, I called him first.” Then he asked me to set up a meeting in the Situation Room. So we then met later in the Situation Room.

That was one of the highlights of my stay there in the National Security Council, but there were many issues. Unfortunately, Henry Kissinger was not interested in Latin America. He really couldn't care less. That was well known and it was well known in Latin America where it led to a feeling that the United States considered the Latin Americans as poor cousins and didn't really care what happened to them. Unfortunately that was to a large extent true, and I think this explains many of the problems we've had in that part of the world. I'm glad to see that this has changed considerably. We were interested in what was happening in Chile, obviously, but this is what the Latin Americans always say: Only when coups d'etat or mass catastrophes occur does the United States remember that down south there are some people who deserve some attention.

So because of Henry's lack of interest in our part of the world, I was not as busy as I would have liked to have been. But it was exciting to be there. I remember writing letters

to people on White House stationery, for instance, and I also went around with a beeper when I went to a restaurant or the supermarket. I once even had my secretary call me on the beeper while I was at the Giant — it was very exciting. (Laughter)

Q: What relationship did you maintain with Agency officials, except in an instance like the management study we mentioned earlier? Did you maintain a continuing relationship, or were you just in effect gone for a year?

VALLIMARESCU: I was in effect gone for a year as far as my immediate neighbors were concerned; that is to say, what we at the Voice used to call “uptown.” But I did maintain a continuing relationship with the people at the Voice because they were “my people.” I used to get together for lunch with you and with others from the Voice because that was my first love. So I had more relations with the Voice people than I did with the people uptown, a block and a half away. Except when there was a policy issue. For instance, when the Chilean thing came about, then the people from IOP would call me and I would consult with Bill Jorden and give them “guidance” from the White House. Otherwise I maintained close relations with the Voice and distant relations with my immediate neighbors.

1974: Vallimarescu Returns To VOA As Deputy Director

Q: When the time came for your departure from the NSC, how did it happen that you were picked to go to VOA as deputy director this time?

VALLIMARESCU: When Henry Kissinger was appointed Secretary of State, I got a call from Jim Keogh in which he said, “Val, do you want to stay on in the NSC or do you want to go on with Henry Kissinger to the seventh floor of the State Department?” I said, “Jim, thank you very much. I'm very grateful for the year I've had here; it was a fascinating experience. But number one, I don't want to go to the State Department and, number two, if you have a good job for me, I'd love to go to the Voice of America again.”

He said, “Well, what a coincidence. I would like you to go there as deputy director.” My first reaction was, “But have you talked to Ken Giddens about it?” He said, “No, but I will.” I said, “Well, I would appreciate it if you would talk to Ken first and get his okay.” So he said, “All right, don't worry about that. But you would take the job?” I said, “Of course I would!” Can you imagine: a translator-announcer, GS-7, becoming deputy director of the Voice? This is quite an accomplishment. My parents would be thrilled.

Well, unfortunately, the way Jim Keogh talked to Giddens — what he did, I gather, was to call him and tell him, “Val will be your deputy.” This was about four or five days before the North-South football game, which was taking place in Ken Giddens' hometown in Alabama. I went to the Voice with an appointment to see Ken, and I could see that he was resentful. He was courteous, but the warmth of our relationship did not seem to be there. We had a short conversation and then I believe it was that same night I called him and said, “Ken, you know how you've always asked me to come down to Alabama. I'm a great football fan — which did not happen to be true at the time but that's neither here nor there — and the North-South game is going to take place this weekend. Would you be able to get me a ticket?” I could already sense that he was feeling better about it. He said, “Of course Val, you come on down and stay with us. We'll have a grand time.”

Which is what I did. I went down, and the other house guests were Frank Shakespeare and his wife. We saw the North-South game, and had a grand time. The Sunday after the game, Ken took me in a corner and said, “Val, I know exactly why you did what you did. I saw from the way you were cheering that you really don't know much about football. (Laughter) But I really appreciate this.” And we're friends again. This was essential. I could not have functioned if Ken had continued to be resentful.

So there I was, deputy director, with the full blessing of Ken Giddens. I had a great time.

A.Frictions Between VOA Director Ken Giddens and USIA Director James Keogh

Q: Let's go back a minute. Do you know why the relationship between Jim Keogh and Ken Giddens was as bad as it was? Was it a matter of personal chemistry, or did they disagree — they certainly didn't disagree politically.

VALLIMARESCU: Well, you know, that's a very good question. I think that the personal chemistry had a lot to do with it. Ken was a very warm, outgoing, outspoken sort of a fellow while Jim Keogh played his cards very close to his chest. I had a lot of respect for Jim Keogh, but he was much more of an introvert. Also, Ken became such a fan of the Voice of America, such an advocate for the Voice of America, that he often lobbied on the Hill for the Voice of America without reference to the Agency. And you take the chemistry and add to it what Jim Keogh felt was Ken Giddens' going behind his back to lobby for one element of the Agency as if that element was independent and autonomous. So things went from bad to worse. It's too bad, because as you said, ideologically they were both conservatives, right of center, and agreed on almost everything, except how to run the Voice.

Q: Ken told me one time that — and you may have been involved in this, I don't know — he told me that Jim Keogh strongly recommended that VOA drop all news activities and become what he called a "Reader's Digest of the Air." And Ken was so alarmed and infuriated by this proposal that this solidified the enmity between the two.

VALLIMARESCU: I remember that Ken told me that. I think another element was the fact that Jim Keogh really knew very little about how the Voice functioned. The physical separation of the Voice and "uptown" was a very negative factor. Jim Keogh didn't come to the Voice very often. He really did not know how the Voice functioned. This thing about Jim Keogh recommending that the Voice become sort of a "Reader's Digest of the Air" — I remember that when Ken told me about it I confronted Jim with that and he denied it. But he said, "Maybe I once, in a fit of anger, said this, but I really didn't mean it." But he felt that the Voice was too much of a free agent and resented the leaks to the newspapers, the

pressures from Congress. He once said, “These people at the Voice act as if they didn't belong to USIA.”

It was a comedy of errors. There was no communication really, basically, and that's why he picked me to go to IOP. When he called me one day and said, “Val, I would like you to be deputy assistant director for policy and plans — this was in 1975 — I said, “Oh Jim, I'd rather stay at the Voice.” So we had lunch and he explained to me that he felt that I could contribute to a rapprochement between the Voice and the Agency, and specifically between the Voice and IOP, because of my understanding of how the Voice functioned and what makes these people tick and my understanding, as a Foreign Service Officer, of what the policy issues and the problems of IOP were. I think he really meant to improve relations, but it was sort of late in the game. By then he was coming to the end of his tenure.

Q: There was an occasion, I think it was when you were deputy director — I don't remember the details of it and you may not either at this point — but there was a situation in Ethiopia in which we at VOA were enjoined not to carry some reports, and you laid your job on the line. You told the Agency policy office, or the Director's office or whatever, that if the Voice were not allowed to carry this report they could have your resignation. Do you recall this instance?

VALLIMARESCU: Now that you mention it — I don't know specifically what it was in Ethiopia — but when you mention my laying my job on the line, I think there were two or three times when I talked to Jim Keogh when they were really trying to clamp down too much, too hard on us, but this specific instance I just don't remember. I do remember that once or twice I did tell Keogh that I would resign unless they were less arbitrary at IOP about the Voice.

Q: Which may have been one of the reasons he selected you for IOP.

VALLIMARESCU: That's correct. That's correct.

1975: Keogh Appoints Vallimarescu To Deputy Director, USIA, Office of Policy and Plans (IOP)

Q: So the decision was made to transfer you to IOP as a kind of bridge between the Agency and the Voice?

VALLIMARESCU: Yes. I went to see Jim and he told me the principal reason for his deciding to appoint me as deputy assistant director for policy and plans was that maybe I could be a bridge between uptown and the Voice of America. So I thanked him, and I did say that I did not know Walter Bastian, who was assistant director for policy and plans — I had just met him socially — but that I knew that Walter was one of the most anti-VOA people in the Agency. Sometimes when he got angry he would refer to the people at the Voice as “those hyphenated Americans” who are fighting their own battles, battles for their countries of origin. I said, “Jim, I don't know whether I can work with him, because if he has that attitude it would be very difficult for me to be that bridge.”

Q: Considering your own background.

VALLIMARESCU: Considering my own background. He said, “Oh come on. You know people will say things in anger that they don't really mean. Why don't you go and talk to Walter?” So I proceeded to do exactly that. From Keogh's office I went to Bastian's office. I said, “Walter, you probably know that Jim wants to appoint me as your deputy.” He said, “Oh, yes, that's a great idea. I'm delighted.” I said, “But you should know that I told him that I wasn't sure I could work for you and with you because of what appears to be your deep-seated resentment of the Voice of America.” I did say that I had told Keogh that sometimes, maybe in anger, he had referred to the people at the Voice as “those hyphenated Americans.” I said, “You know, I happen to be one of them, although I don't consider myself a Romanian-American; I'm an American of Romanian descent. I don't like

being called a hyphenated American." He sort of laughed and said, "Oh, Val, you shouldn't take these things seriously. I do resent the attitude of some people at the Voice, but I'm sure we can work together." And it turned out we could work together.

I accepted the job, and I was in the job for almost a year. I think, looking back on it, that during that year relations between the Agency, and specifically IOP, and the Voice improved somewhat. I remember being with the Voice people, trying to explain why IOP took certain positions, as unreasonable as they may have seemed to the Voice, and to IOP I did exactly the contrary, explaining what the Voice was all about. I believe I arranged for regular meetings between the policy people at the Voice and the people in IOP. There was certainly a warming of relations. I don't remember specific examples, but there were at least three or four instances where problems which in the past had assumed warlike proportions were solved reasonably. So I look back upon that one year, almost one year, with some satisfaction.

1976: New Administration: Carter President, New Director, Reinhardt and New Deputy Director Charles Bray. Vallimarescu Abruptly Told He Will Be Replaced In IOP. Followed By Six Months With No New Assignment

However, we come to 1976, and the election of '76 — Carter's victory. John Reinhardt is designated director of USIA. The transition team comes to the Agency and sets up offices. Keogh resigns and Gene Kopp is acting director. This brings Walter Bastian in effect to number two and Vallimarescu number three in the Agency during that short period of transition. A month or two later, before Reinhardt is confirmed and takes over, Kopp leaves, so Walter Bastian is acting director and Vallimarescu is acting deputy director. Charlie Bray had already been selected as deputy director and was established at USIA in an office but was not officially deputy director. We had talked about having lunch one day because he said he wanted to talk about VOA-USIA relations.

So we go to lunch and we talk about VOA-USIA relations. I tell Charlie Bray that I had come to IOP not to bury the Voice but to praise it. We had a pleasant lunch, but then over coffee — it was a Tuesday, I remember — over coffee he tells me, “By the way, Val, Friday will be your last day in your present position. Bastian's last day as well. You, Val, will be replaced by Hal Schneidman and Alan Carter will take Walter Bastian's place.” I was sort of taken aback. Of course I didn't expect to hold on to the job forever; I was sure that Mr. Reinhardt would have his own choice. But I felt it was rather peremptory, and I told Charlie Bray, “I'm very sorry that John Reinhardt didn't give me this news himself. After all I am a senior Foreign Service officer and I think I deserve to be told by the director-designate himself.” He said, “Well, he tried to call you over the weekend but you weren't there.” Well, this being said, I get back to my office and discover that Bastian had taken off for New York. He had been told by Reinhardt himself that he would no longer be in the job, and he just took off.

The next morning, when we had the regular director's meeting, with all the area and media directors, I was seated at John Reinhardt's left, which was usually Walter Bastian's seat, and Charlie Bray was on John Reinhardt's right. John Reinhardt opened the meeting saying, “I have a personnel announcement. Walter Bastian is being replaced by Alan Carter, Vallimarescu is being replaced by Hal Schneidman, effective Monday.” Then he turns to Charlie Bray and says, “Do you have anything to report?” “No.” He turns to me, “Val, do you have anything to report?” I happened to have something to report, some FBIS item from Radio Moscow. But I was sort of sad that it was announced without any “Thank you, Val.”

That night my younger son, who was back from Harvard, picked me up in front of the Agency. When I got in the car he saw that I was a little shaken. He said, “What's the matter, Daddy?” I said, “I've just been fired.” “What do you mean, fired?” He stopped the car and I told him what had happened. He said, “Daddy, I wanted to join USIA after I graduated from Harvard, but if that's the way they treat people like you I want no part of

it.” Well! He was leaving the next morning, going back to Cambridge for a wedding and left early. When I came down to have breakfast I found on the kitchen table a little note from Dan which said: “Daddy, forget the political world. You are beautiful. Happy Father's Day. Your loving son, Dan.” It made my day.

I arrive at the Agency for our regular IOP meeting and tell them about this personnel change, which they, of course, knew all about. I said, “You know, I was pretty shaken yesterday, but I feel pretty good this morning. I found this note from my son. And he's right. I am beautiful. And I'll forget the political world if I can.” Well, I must say that several of the secretaries were crying when they heard my opening remarks. Then I reported on the director's meeting, and asked them to give their support to Alan Carter and Hal Schneidman. That same day I got a call from Buenos Aires telling me that my mother had died. So I had to ask for emergency leave and put in the request, which John Reinhardt had to sign. I couldn't get a seat on a plane until Sunday.

Friday morning, Alan Carter and Schneidman came into my office and apologized for the way this had been handled. They asked me if I would take them around and introduce them to the people on the staff, which I did. While doing that I happened to run into John Reinhardt, who was waiting for the elevator. He looks at me with a big smile and says, “Hello, Val, how are things with you?” I must say that I was really taken aback. I had just been fired, my mother had just died, and there he is. I just want to say that since then, when I was in Madrid, he came to Madrid and we got along very well. I think the problem was that John is basically rather shy and is not a very outgoing person right away. It takes a while for him to warm up. I gather, from my conversation with him later, he was a little embarrassed by the way all this had been handled. My relations with John Reinhardt became very good.

So I was out of a job. I went down to Buenos Aires for about a week, and when I came back Walter Bastian was still in New York. He was pouting. I had no office. So I went to the people in personnel and said, “What do I do now?” Charlie Bray had asked me to sort of

wind things up and help Alan Carter and Hal Schneidman. There were some reports to be finished so they gave me a desk somewhere in IOP and I finished those reports in about a week. Then I had nothing to do. They moved me to a broom closet some- where, and I became the highest paid crossword puzzle solver, I think, in the whole U.S. Government. I did them all: The New York Times, the Baltimore Sun, the Washington Post ....

Q: How long did you go through this?

VALLIMARESCU: I went through this for six months. I went from one broom closet to another. I ended up being in the office where the auditors brewed their coffee! But I came every day. I came every day. Walter came back to Washington, but Walter, and maybe he was right, would just pick up the phone every other day and call personnel and say, “Is there an assignment for me?”

Q: Let's stop just a minute. At some point in this chronology you received the Edward R. Murrow Award. That was when you were at the Voice, wasn't it?

Backtrack To Vallimarescu's Receipt Of The Edward R. Murrow Award

VALLIMARESCU: That was when I was at the Voice, yes. The Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy. I was at the Voice then.

Q: Well, we've skipped that entirely.

VALLIMARESCU: Yes, we've skipped that, I'm afraid.

Q: Well, I want to hear about that. Let's go back to that now, and pick up again. What were the circumstances of your being nominated and being given the title of Edward R. Murrow Fellow?

VALLIMARESCU: It is one of my most cherished memories. I have the award framed and hanging in my home in Buenos Aires. I was at the Voice as deputy director, and I got

a call from uptown telling me that I had been nominated and the nomination had been approved by the board that selects the winning nominee. I remember that the nomination was submitted by Ken Giddens, with the assistance of certain individuals in the Voice of America, one of whom was Cliff Groce. I was absolutely elated, delighted. And I even got a call from Mrs. Murrow — and I reminded her of that the other night at the Alumni Association dinner — who said, “Val, as you know I'm a member of the board which decides on these nominations, and I'm very glad to see that my candidate won, because I voted for you.”

This goes back — I knew them from Santo Domingo because Murrow and Mrs. Murrow came to Santo Domingo when I was PAO there. They spent a week there, two days of consultation and the rest just relaxing before a PAO conference that was going to take place in Panama. Needless to say, my wife and my two sons were very proud of me. All four of us went up to Tufts. Also on the platform was Pat Moynihan, who had given a talk at Tufts and they had invited him to witness the ceremony. That's about it. Later on, when I was in Buenos Aires, I got a formal notification from the Agency that I had been nominated for the President's Award, whatever they call that — it's higher than anything else — and that being nominated was an honor in itself, but somebody else was selected. The nomination that time was submitted by Ambassador Frank Ortiz. Anyway, that was the Edward R. Murrow Award.

1978: After Six Months Of Crossword Puzzles, A few Months With The Inspection Corps, Then Events Leading To PAO Madrid

To go back to my crossword puzzles. Dan Oleksiw was then chief of inspections. He found out that I was doing crossword puzzles and figured I was capable of doing something else. He got me on the inspection staff. That was a big relief because I had something substantive to do. I went on a couple of inspections. During the last one I was on — I was chief inspector and it was Stockholm and we are talking now of May, 1978 — I get a call from the chief of Foreign Service Personnel saying, “Val, how would you like to go

to Madrid as PAO?" I said, "How would I like to?!" I had asked John Reinhardt — while I was on the inspection staff I did get an interview with John Reinhardt. He asked to see me. He apologized in effect for not having talked to me, not having given me the news of my dismissal and then said, "We want to do the right thing by you. Where would you like to go when and if an opening arises?" I said, "Well, I would love to go to Madrid as PAO." He said, "Well, we'll keep that in mind." That had been about a year before I got this call in Stockholm. The chief of Foreign Service Personnel told me there was one more hurdle — I had to get the approval of the ambassador-designate to Spain, Terence Todman, who was in Washington waiting for his confirmation hearings.

I get back to Washington and of course the family is quite excited at the thought of going to Madrid. I make an appointment with Ambassador Todman at the State Department. He greeted me very courteously two days later and proceeded to ask me why I wanted to go to Spain as PAO, what my background was. He had my file, but he wanted a man-to-man discussion. Then he started speaking to me in Spanish. He said, "I know you're rated 4+,4+, but I've learned not to trust FSI ratings fully." Well, he saw that I did speak Spanish quite well and we spent about 45 minutes discussing Spain and Latin America. Then he tells me, "Well, Val, thank you very much, but I have two other candidates to interview. I'll let you know."

About three days later I get a call early in the morning. He says, "Val, are you packed?" I said, "Who's this?" "It's Ambassador Todman. I want you to go to Madrid as PAO." And he wanted me to get there a couple of weeks before he was scheduled to arrive. So I did. I arrived there in July of 1978 and he came a couple of weeks later. And that was the beginning of a wonderful four years in Madrid with Terry Todman — who happens to be the ambassador in Buenos Aires now.

Spain was an exciting post because it was returning to democracy after many, many years of Franco. Franco, of course, died in 1975, but three years later the Spaniards were still celebrating the return to democracy, which manifested itself, among other things, with

a slew of newspapers, magazines — pornographic and not pornographic, pornographic movies. Some of the Spaniards were absolutely desperate — if this is what democracy means, we don't want any part of it. I'm exaggerating, but the fact is it was a release of tensions that manifested itself with a little bit of what they call in Spanish “libertinaje.”

Q: Liberty becomes license.

A.Handling Cultural Portion of Renegotiation Of “Treaty Of Friendship And Cooperation” With Spain

VALLIMARESCU: Yes. But they settled down to serious business and Spain is a success story today. I think one of the interesting things of my tour there was the fact that we had a treaty of friendship and cooperation, as it's called, with Spain, which in effect allowed us to keep four military bases on Spanish territory — in return for which there was a cultural element in the treaty, which was really what the payoff was all about. It provided for cultural exchanges, cultural grants, money for Spanish universities, and we also had a very active Fulbright Commission there, with the Spanish government contributing some money to it. Of course, some of the money they contributed came from us anyway through the treaty. (Laughter)

But it was a very active program. And it was during that period, in my last year there, that we renegotiated certain aspects of the treaty, including the cultural element of it. I attended most of the meetings, and I also headed our mini-delegation which was renegotiating the cultural part. It was a very productive and fascinating time.

B.President Carter's Visit

We also had during my time there a presidential visit. Carter came to Spain. As a matter of fact, he came to Madrid from Belgrade. And there are some anecdotes. Are you interested in anecdotes?

Q: Of course.

VALLIMARESCU: We were informed from Belgrade that the President would give his toast at the official luncheon which the King and Queen were giving for the Carters at the palace. He would give his toast, which in effect was a speech, in Spanish. Both Ambassador Todman and I cringed, because we remembered a rather unfortunate experience that Carter had had in Mexico where he tried to speak Spanish and used the wrong words and all hell broke loose. So the ambassador sent a cable to Belgrade urging that the President speak in English because the King spoke fluent English and liked to speak English, and that it's usually more appropriate that official statements, official speeches, be given by heads of state in their respective languages. But we couldn't budge him; he was going to speak in Spanish. So Alice and I, and Todman and Mrs. Todman and quite a number of other people arrived at the luncheon at the palace. I kept my fingers crossed through a scrumptious lunch with magnificent wines. When the time for toasts came I had a very irregular heartbeat. The President did a magnificent job. He spoke for 15 minutes in Spanish, and he only stumbled over two or three long words. I've always said that people who prepare speeches in a foreign language for someone should avoid using words that are very difficult to pronounce.

So everything goes very well and we get up from the table and move into another room for liqueurs and coffee. It just so happened that Alice and I were among the first to follow the King and the Queen into the room. The King was alone for a minute. Knowing that he had a good sense of humor, I said, “Your Majesty...

I have to back up a bit. In Spain restaurants are given forks instead of stars. Four forks are the equivalent of four stars — the best you can get. So I tell the King, “Your Majesty, this was a superb meal. Allow me to give the royal kitchen four forks.” And the King says, “Well Mr. Vallimarescu, I have news for you. This meal was catered by the Jockey — Jockey was the best restaurant in Madrid — and they already have their four forks!”

But then he said, “You can do something for me. Right behind me is your President, with your ambassador, with my ambassador to Washington, with my prime minister (Suarez), with Mr. Brzezinski, and with Santiago Carillo (who was the secretary general of the Communist Party; the King invited all the heads of the political parties to luncheon), and they are laughing very hard. I would like to know what makes them laugh.” I said, “Your Majesty, I'm sure you'll find out before I can, but I'll do my best.” By then there were people pushing behind — you know, “Don't monopolize His Majesty.” So we move on, and the little group that the King had mentioned was just breaking up. I go to Ambassador Todman and say, “The King wants to know what you were laughing about.” He said, “Well, I'll tell you. The old fox, Santiago Carillo, the Communist secretary, had been congratulating the President on his Spanish. But he said, 'Mr. President, you did have problems with longer words, such as autoritarismo — authoritarianism.' And Carter, God bless him, said immediately, 'Oh, but Mr. Carillo, this is a concept so alien to us that we cannot even pronounce the word.' And that broke them up.”

Now this anecdote reflects a little bit what the relations between Carter and the White House press corps were. I tried to buttonhole several of the journalists, White House press corps people who were there, to give them this anecdote. I felt that U.S. News and World Report could publish it as a “Whisper,” for instance. They couldn't care less. They didn't like Carter, and they weren't going to publish anything that made him look good. But I did get it in two Madrid dailies.

And if I can make a parenthesis here, many years later — 1984 or 85 — when I was PAO in Buenos Aires, the Carters came to Buenos Aires on a private visit. They stayed at the residence; the ambassador was out of town. The DCM was very busy. There were meetings and a press conference and when the time for them to leave came, the DCM, who was charg#, was very busy and couldn't go to the airport. I was number three in the embassy and he told me, “Val, you have to accompany the Carters to the airport.” Carter wanted a press conference at the airport so we tried to arrange one. We arrived at the

airport about an hour and a half ahead of time in order to meet the screaming reporters. Well, there were no reporters, except for one guy from one of the radio stations. I was quite embarrassed. Furthermore, I had about an hour and a half to spend alone in the VIP room with the Carters. I decided to remind him of the story I've just told you. I said, “Mr. President, you may have forgotten, but you made us all very proud when you were in Madrid” — and I told him the story. He said, “Oh, Val! That's right! I had forgotten about that.” And his wife, who obviously was much more bitter than he was about having lost the election, said, “You see, Jimmy, you see. I always told you that those journalists, that White House press corps, hated you and did everything they could to sabotage you.” To me that was an interesting vignette of how she felt. She was still very bitter about losing the election and about the way she felt the press had treated her husband.

1982: PAO Buenos Aires

Q: Where did you go when you left Madrid?

VALLIMARESCU: In May of 1982 I am informed that I have been selected to be PAO Buenos Aires, which made one person in my little family extremely happy — my father. After my mother died — they were living in Buenos Aires, they were Argentine citizens — I had convinced my father not to stay alone in BA, although he had lots of friends, but to join us and become part of our family. He did come to Washington, sold his apartment in Buenos Aires, and accompanied us to Madrid as my dependent. When he heard we were going to be assigned to Buenos Aires he was absolutely enchanted. He had lived there for 35 years and had a lot of friends. The Malvinas — to you gringos, the Falklands — war broke out in April while we were in Madrid, but ready to leave for Washington and Buenos Aires. Father got very upset. He said, “This stupid Galtieri — he was the general who was the president who invaded the Malvinas — this stupid general! Now they're not going to send you to Buenos Aires! Now you're probably going to break relations.”

Well, we did go to Buenos Aires, via Washington to attend my son John's wedding in June of 1982. You know, it's a very long trip from Washington to Buenos Aires. It actually took us 22 hours, door to door. You fly at night, change planes. We arrived in Buenos Aires in August, 1982. We had the full USIS American staff at the airport, plus two or three of my father's friends. It was about noon. We went to the PAO's apartment and there were drinks laid out. Alice was absolutely exhausted, but she was a good hostess and they stayed for a couple of hours. When they finally left, Alice collapsed in an armchair and said, “Val, why did you bring me down to the South Pole?!”

Well, what can I say about Buenos Aires? Argentine-U.S. relations for many, many years were rather tense. Even before Peron, but Peron made it worse because of his very chauvinistic, nationalistic attitude. And now, in August, 1982, there was still considerable resentment because of our support for the British. We were not particularly liked. I remember that the ambassador, who was Harry Shlaudeman — a very close friend (we had been colleagues in Santo Domingo when he was political counselor and I was PAO) — called me in about a week after I had arrived and said, “Val, I'll give you your first assignment. The New York Philharmonic was scheduled to come down here to play at the Colon Theater, which is like La Scala in Milan, and they are having some second thoughts. They are afraid that there will be incidents, that they will not be welcome, but I heard this morning that they have decided to go ahead. Now I have a decision to make — and that's your first assignment: you're going to make the decision for me. Do I give a reception for Zubin Mehta and the orchestra, or don't I? If I give a reception and almost nobody shows up — Argentines — that's a big slap in our face. But you decide.”

So I consult with the Argentine impresario who was organizing this and we decide we're going to take a chance. We're going to have the ambassador invite 500 people to a big reception at the residence. Mind you, this was September, 1982, four months after the end of the war and the defeat of the Argentines by the Brits — with our help. Needless to say, I was keeping my fingers crossed again. The reception was a roaring success. Seventy-

five or 80 percent of the people invited came, and that was interpreted by the Department of State, and by the media down in Argentina, as an indication that the Argentines were ready to let bygones be bygones. So it was my first success in Buenos Aires.

Q: Fortunately, it was a cultural event.

VALLIMARESCU: It was a cultural event, but it was a cultural event with political connotations. So that was a big hit. My stay in Argentina was, of course, marred, as you know, by Alice's worsening illness. She was getting worse and worse. But the first two years were wonderful years. My second ambassador — Harry Shlaudeman was pulled out a year after I had arrived because Kissinger wanted him to head that special commission on Central America — was Frank Ortiz, whom again I knew since Mexico City days, 1958-59, when he was special assistant to the ambassador there. So again it was a friend who was ambassador, which helped very much. We had a very good team and looking back at those first two years we had a good team and did a good job, I believe, in really warming up Argentine-U.S. relations. It was a busy time. I spent a lot of time with journalists and academics and politicians. It was encouraging to see that through a man-to-man, people-to-people type of approach, progress could be made.

My last two years were marred by Alice's illness. As you know, she died in February, 1986. My four-year tour was scheduled to end in May, 1986, but the Agency asked me to extend for a year, which I did. Relations between Argentina and the U.S. today are better than they have ever been. Again, we contributed our little grain of sand to this. Well, there are many other stories I could tell about Buenos Aires and Argentina.

Q: Please tell some.

A.The Outrageous CODEL Trip To Buenos Aires Headed By Speaker “Tip” O'Neal, And The Aftermath (An Ambassador Removed)

VALLIMARESCU: Well, as you know, certain countries overseas are very popular places for Congressmen to visit, especially in the winter. When it's winter here, January and February, and summer in Buenos Aires, the CODELs are coming one after the other. One I remember especially was headed by the then Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill. He had already announced that he was retiring, so this was his last junket, in effect. He came down heading a CODEL which consisted of some 35 to 40 people, including wives and staff assistants. And of course in a special Air Force plane.

Q: What was the purpose of their trip?

VALLIMARESCU: The purpose of their trip, officially, was to consult with Argentine congressmen and government officials on U.S.-Argentine relations. About a month before they were scheduled to arrive it was quite clear that one thing they really wanted to do was play golf. One officer in the embassy was assigned full time to working out the details of this golf trip. They requested that a special tournament be organized for them. So the “golf officer” of the embassy contacted the Esso people — there they're called Esso, not Exxon — and Esso agreed to finance this little operation and to work with the embassy in setting up the golf tournament.

Q: Which was to consist of Argentines as well as Americans?

VALLIMARESCU: Argentines and Americans, yes. Also, the embassy was instructed to find a golf cart for the Speaker. Now in Argentina they don't use golf carts, they use the little portable caddies. The poor man had the time of his life trying to find an electric golf cart, and he didn't. I remember that Tip O'Neill was very upset by this. So they arrive, are taken to their hotel, and immediately ask the people in the control room for the best place to buy leather, to buy wool, what the best restaurants are, change money, and proceed to sort of disappear — most of them. Tip O'Neill and some of the congressmen did come to the embassy for a briefing by the ambassador, but they kept looking at their watches because they didn't want to waste too much time on this nonsense. To make a

long story short, they stayed in Buenos Aires I believe three full days. They played golf for at least a day and a half. They resented the fact that they had to go to a reception at the ambassador's residence. The ambassador felt he had to invite Argentine congressmen and political figures to his home to meet these congressmen. They really didn't want to have this reception, but most of them attended, but not all of them. They left early because they wanted to go gallivanting.

They did see President Alfonsin for an hour or so. So in effect they spent a little over three days and they “worked” about two and a half-hours. During the meeting with President Alfonsin, which was attended by Ambassador Ortiz, the Speaker and one other member of the delegation, a Democrat whose name escapes me at the moment, made a strong pitch for him to, in effect, lobby with many of his Latin American colleagues and even with people in the United States, against the U.S. policy in Central America, and specifically in Nicaragua. I believe a vote was upcoming on this whole issue of Nicaragua.

Needless to say, Ambassador Ortiz was absolutely stunned that a U.S. Congressman would in effect lobby against his own government's policy with a foreign head of state, and so informed the Speaker when he drove him back to the airport. The Speaker was very upset at the ambassador's recriminations, and later on Frank Ortiz was removed from Buenos Aires and sent to New Mexico as diplomat-in-residence at the University of New Mexico. A lot of people said that it was Tip O'Neill's last shot at the ambassador.

The story appear in print, in the New York Time and the Washington Post. The New York Times at the time had a special column of News from Washington and they had a blurb about how much this CODEL cost the U.S. taxpayer and what the U.S. taxpayer got in return — in effect, very little. Both papers' correspondents had asked me how the visit had gone or was going, and what they had done when they were in Buenos Aires. And I told them. They used it. End of story. I don't regret it. Although it didn't do much good.

I don't know how these junkets are going now, if they still are as outrageous as they used to be in terms of wasting the taxpayer's money, but I do remember that the next CODELs were a little more productive in terms of cost effectiveness for the U.S. taxpayer. The best one was CODEL Baker, who came by himself and worked hard for three or four days. Senator Baker took his job very seriously. There was no fooling around, no shopping, no golf playing. My hat off to him.

Q: Any other principal issues or other anecdotes?

B.Military Rebellions And U.S. Role In Support Of Argentine Presidents

VALLIMARESCU: Well, yes, issues there were because during my stay there as PAO, and Ambassador Ortiz and then Gildred, there were four military rebellions. Our government, of course, gave its full, full support to President Alfonsin, made it very clear on whose side we were on. As a matter of fact, one specific anecdote — what I'm going to tell you now also contributed to the warming of relations.

When a group of officers tried to unseat the government, the ambassador was Gildred, a businessman, a political appointee. I lived two blocks from the embassy. It was, I believe, a Saturday, and I rushed to the embassy when I heard these people were up in arms. The ambassador was there and there were calls from political leaders for Argentines to mass in front of their White House, called the Pink House, Casa Rosada, in support of Alfonsin and democracy. Alfonsin was going to address them. He had announced that he was going to fly to the barracks in the out- skirts of Buenos Aires where the principal rebels were.

In the meantime at the embassy chancery, we had drafted a message from President Reagan to Alfonsin, announcing that we were supporting him wholeheartedly, that we were supporting democracy and the democratic institutions. It had been sent to the California White House, where the President was. I asked the ambassador, “Are we going

to get it soon?" He said, "I don't know. They said it was going to come in the next few hours."

I said, "Mr. Ambassador, please contact them right away because Alfonsin is ready to go to the center of the rebellion and it would be marvelous if that telegram could reach him before he goes there and can be read to the massed Argentines." Well, the ambassador moved quickly. He got through to the White House in California, and we were able to call the Casa Rosada and transmit that telegram of support. Alfonsin had already taken off by helicopter, but Caputo, the foreign minister, was able to go out on the balcony and say, "We have just received this telegram from the President of the United States." And for the first time in my years in Argentina, I heard a roar of "Long live the United States!" That was quite a breakthrough.

Q: It certainly was.

VALLIMARESCU: And of course this support was continued throughout and it contributed to the fact that military coups in Argentina are now probably out of the question. Out of the question.

Q: Quite a change.

VALLIMARESCU: Quite a change. I was no longer PAO, but I was there when Vice President Quayle came, and I happened to have attended a working breakfast near the Plaza San Martin, where all heads of state and important visitors always lay a wreath on the statue of the liberator of Argentina, San Martin. I saw the crowd and the red carpet and said, "Oh my goodness, Quayle must be coming to lay a wreath." So I stayed. There was a huge crowd on both sides of the plaza. I just wanted to see what kind of a reception he would get. They arrived at 11 o'clock sharp, and to my amazement there was an ovation for the Vice President and his wife as he went up the steps to the statue to lay the wreath.

Then when he turned around the same thing happened again. Well, it wouldn't have been that way eight years ago.

And the same was true when President Bush visited Argentina. That was an interesting development because on December 3 last year there was another mini-rebellion. It wasn't that mini, because there were a number of people killed this time. President Bush was scheduled to arrive on December 5 on his official state visit. The Secret Service people in Brasilia, where Bush was, were very upset and wanted to cancel the visit. The President talked to Ambassador Todman and Todman stuck his neck out. The ambassador said, “Mr. President, I think it will be over by 8 o'clock tonight.” And it was, and the President came two days late. That was tremendous because had he canceled we would never have recovered.

Q: Was Todman guessing, or did he —

VALLIMARESCU: No, he had pretty good information. He had seen already how President Menem had reacted as soon as it broke. He gave orders to put down the rebellion, no negotiations. Alfonsin, for different reasons, had negotiated with these rebels. There was one last holdout, which was the headquarters of the army, right across the street from the Pink House. It was still holding out about four o'clock in the afternoon — the thing having started about six in the morning — and Menem said, “All right, if they don't surrender by six I'm going to order the air force to just blast them out of existence. They surrendered by 5:30. So it was pretty clear; he wasn't just guessing, though I'm sure he was still a little nervous. So then Bush came and got a tremendous reception.

1987: Retirement: Touching Farewell Parties, Honors, Post Retirement Activities Related To U.S./Argentine Cultural Programs And Exchanges

Q: When the time came for you to retire, I remember there was a party in Washington for your farewell. Tell me about it.

VALLIMARESCU: Well, that was very moving. Donna Oglesby, who was area director for Latin America, had said that she wanted to give a party for me when I came to Washington after my retirement. I retired May 39, 1987 and in June I was coming to Washington. She asked me to give her a list of people. I did, and quite a lot of people showed up. I was very happy. One of the most moving things was that about halfway through the reception I was presented with a basket filled with what looked like diplomas, all rolled up with little red ribbons. Donna had sent sort of a round robin telegram to all areas of the world — Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America — saying, “We're giving a party for Val, who's retiring. If you have any messages, please send them.” And that's what these were; there were about 40 rolled up diplomas.

Q: That was a very nice touch.

VALLIMARESCU: Oh, it was wonderful. She said, “I don't expect you to read them all now.” There were a couple of telegrams from posts in Africa — one-man posts — from young officers who were PAOs who said, “We've never met you but we've heard a lot about you and we wish you well in your retirement.” One of the most moving telegrams was from Ambassador Todman, who was then ambassador in Copenhagen. It was an extraordinary experience. I have those in a special scrapbook, and I will always remember them.

And of course Charlie Wick came on a visit to Buenos Aires a month before I retired. He surprised me. Donna Oglesby had told me he was going to present this little award to the assistant cultural attach#, Nick Robertson, who was in on the game; there would be a little ceremony in the embassy auditorium. Well, it turned out to be a distinguished honor award for me. Wick said a few words, and Donna said a few words.

So looking back on it, you know, some people complain some- times that distinguished or respectable service is not recognized. I can't complain. I've been very well treated by the Agency, and I think if I were to start it all over again I'd do the same thing: start at the

Voice as GS-7 (laughter), hoping to become director this time, not deputy director. It's been a very rewarding experience and I'm glad I went through it.

Now of course I am retired in Buenos Aires, remarried to an Argentine, and am keeping my oar in. I was elected vice-president of the Fulbright alumni association, and I'm actually acting president because the elected president is minister of justice and education. He asked for sabbatical leave, so I'm acting president. We carry out a number of projects, exchanges of people. I'm also honorary adviser to the binational center there, which is totally autonomous, independent of the U.S. Government. I've been asked to give talks to the Argentine government's foreign service school. I talked to their graduating class last November, and I'm talking to the incoming class in June. So — I manage to stay busy.

Q: Any other recollections that you want to get on the record?

VALLIMARESCU: There are too many of them. I'll send you my book. This is going to be very helpful. I've finally decided that I'm going to do what Alice, my first wife, wanted me to do; my sons have been pushing me to do; and now my wife, Barbara, wants me to do: write a book — I don't know whether you'd call it memoirs — going back to when I first came to the United States in 1940, mostly for my children and grandchildren. I'm doing a lot of research on it, looking through papers that have accumulated in my former house on Van Ness Street where my son John lives now. And these transcripts are also going to be important to me.

Q: Thank you very much, Val.

End of interview